

Nebraskan Conservatives Voice Concerns Over Death Penalty

Nebraska's death penalty has suffered from delay, high costs, and ineffectiveness. Frustrations with this system are growing. In response, a number of Nebraska conservatives have joined efforts to repeal the death penalty. Their reasons include its high cost, concerns over executing an innocent person, and a commitment to promoting a culture of life.

What Nebraskans are Saying

“Conservatives know that government is imperfect and makes mistakes. My desire to protect innocent life leads me to worry about a fallible system that has the power to take a life... If this (the death penalty) were any other government program, we would have got rid of it a long time ago.”

-Republican State Senator Colby Coash

“Evangelicals are also becoming increasingly aware of the massive injustices carried out in the death penalty system. Throughout the Old Testament, you find various laws that God established to ensure that the poor would not be unjustly treated in courts, that innocents would never be executed, and that there would be fair application of the death penalty. These safeguards and standards rendered the death penalty almost obsolete in Bible times. The death penalty in the US has failed in these safeguards.”

-Bill Thornton, Assoc. Prof. of Preaching Ministries – NE Christian College

“Of the accused murderers my fellow officers and I have brought to justice, I do not believe any of them was deterred in the least by Nebraska's death penalty.”

-Captain Jim Davidsaver, Lincoln Police Dept.

“Although I have no moral qualms about the death penalty, I feel it is subject to human error. One has only to refer to the recent exonerations of six men and women from...Beatrice.”

-James Murphy, Retired District Court Judge & Former Douglas County Prosecutor

Nebraska's Death Penalty – A Broken System

Risk of Executing an Innocent Person

- ◆ Since 1973, 150 individuals in the US have been wrongfully sentenced to death and later exonerated. More than 300 others, including six in Nebraska, have been exonerated from long prison sentences as a result of dramatic advances in DNA testing.
- ◆ Nebraskan Matthew Livers was interrogated for 11 hours, and threatened with the electric chair before he confessed to the murder of his Aunt and Uncle. However, he didn't do it and the real murderers are now serving life sentences for that crime.
- ◆ DNA has irrefutably shown that we make mistakes, but it's no silver bullet. DNA evidence is available in only 5-10% of criminal cases. Even when it is available, in some cases investigators have falsified evidence. A human system can never be 100% accurate.

Costly and Ineffective Government Program

- ◆ The death penalty is consistently more expensive than life in prison without parole because of the additional preparation in capital cases, the separate sentencing phase, post-conviction appeals, and the added costs of death row.
- ◆ Between 1973 and 2007, Nebraska taxpayers paid for 103 cases in which the prosecution sought the death penalty, only 31 of which resulted in a death sentence. More than half of those death sentences were reversed, and only three have resulted in an execution. The cost per execution in Nebraska is estimated to be \$15 million dollars.
- ◆ Richardson County nearly went bankrupt and had to borrow money against its ambulances in order to pay for two capital cases.

A Failed Policy for Murder Victims' Families

- ◆ Capital cases prolong the legal process, keeping the victims' families in legal limbo for years. All the while, the offender is kept in the limelight and victims' families may be without critical resources. A single capital case costs millions, which can divert resources away from counseling and support services addressing the many needs faced by all victims' families. In 2012, Nebraska was ranked last in the nation for funding victims' services.

Growing Concerns Over Nebraska's Death Penalty

- ◆ In 2013, a majority of Nebraska state senators supported repealing the death penalty – the bill only failed to advance due to a filibuster.
- ◆ 2014 saw the fewest executions nationwide in 20 years, the fewest death sentences in 40 years, and a record number of exonerations of the wrongfully convicted.