



SEEKING JUSTICE

IN TEXAS

TEXAS COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

WORKING TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY IN TEXAS / FALL 2006

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A Note from the Chair Jimmie L. Coombes, President



In an unprecedented show of consolidated effort, many of the Texas death penalty abolitionist organizations have joined forces this summer to plan a statewide campaign to educate the public and the legislators on the fallacies inherent in capital punishment. The newly formed collaboration, entitled the "Abolition Coalition of Texas", (ACT), has elected a board of directors comprised of selected members from the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the Texas Moratorium Network, Texas Students Against the Death Penalty, the Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement, and Victims of Texas. Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation will also be involved through its collaboration with TCADP.

Pending grant funding, ACT plans to "take the abolitionist message" and organizing power to smaller cities of the state--areas such as Wichita Falls, Abilene, Tyler, Amarillo, and Midland, where local newspaper and television/radio media seldom, if ever, present an anti-death penalty stance. In addition, ACT has formulated plans to focus part of its educational tour on Harris County, with its disproportional representation on Death Row, and on key legislative districts throughout the state.

ACT will send members of Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, family members of those on Death Row and of those who have been executed, and exonerated former condemned inmates to speak in a wide variety of forums. Film screenings, art exhibits, and training sessions in grassroots organizing will be included in the campaign. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the planners of the events will be to place speakers in hitherto untested venues, exemplified by conservative student organizations and often more conservative business and community organizations such as the Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions' Clubs. Organizers are also planning a statewide rally and lobby day to coincide with the middle of the 2007 legislative session, as well as an Alternative Spring Break for college students.

We are all aware of the many challenges and opportunities ACT faces. With a goal of a moratorium on executions in Texas in 2009...and ultimately of total abolition of the death penalty, ACT is aiming high. **MAY WE ALL SOAR ON THE WINGS OF EAGLES!**

Impending Executions

Please note that dates are tentative.

September

12th - Farley Matchett

25th - Pedro Sosa

October

19th - Michael Johnson

25th - Gregory Summers

November

1st - Donnel Jackson

8th - Willie Shannon

DATES TO REMEMBER!

10/14- 27

Virginia Journey of Hope

10/20-22

National Weekend of Faith

10/28

7th March to Stop Executions!

10/27-29

NCADP Conference-Virginia



News from Nancy

National Weekend of Faith in Action, October 20-22, 2006



The National Weekend of Faith in Action is an occasion for faith communities, interfaith groups, human rights activists, and individuals to examine the death penalty from the perspective of their own faith traditions and values. It's also an opportunity to discuss views on this issue in a safe and comfortable space.

The NWFA can be anything organizers want it to be in their community - it's not a national conference, it's a local solidarity event organized by people like you.

Upon registration, the NWFA will send participants a free resource guide to help them organize an event or discussion. A free DVD on the death penalty that can be used to jump start a discussion will also be included in the information packet..

To receive the free materials, register at www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction/register.html

For activity ideas, go to www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction/activities.html

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA
INVITES YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
**2006 NATIONAL WEEKEND OF
FAITH IN ACTION**
ON THE DEATH PENALTY
OCTOBER 20-22, 2006



WWW.AMNESTYUSA.ORG/FAITHINACTION/

Nancy Bailey

PO Box 1566

Bellaire, TX

77402-1566



If you would like TCADP to send a letter on the NWFA with a brochure on the event and a TCADP speakers' bureau brochure, please drop contact name and address in an email to info@tcadp.org, with Weekend of Faith in Action in the subject line.

Now is the time to be talking to your faith communities about hosting a conversation on the death penalty for the NWFA. Remind them that they can construct the conversation in a way that they feel comfortable. All the resources from Amnesty are free, including the DVD. First time participants will receive a copy of *The Empty Chair*, repeat participants will receive a copy of *The Exonerated* with Susan Sarandon and Brian Denehy.

SEEKING JUSTICE IN TEXAS

Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty
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Newsletter Editor: Vicki McCuiston, info@tcadp.org,
Fall Issue #15, 2006 Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall Issues

Mail your name, address, and phone number with annual donation to Austin office to receive quarterly newsletters. All donations are tax-deductible, Thank you! If you are already a member and would like to receive the TCADP newsletter via email send your name and email address to info@tcadp.org.

**TX Board
of Criminal Justice
Board Meeting
October 26 & 27,
(public comments)**

**TX Prison Museum
491 Hwy 75 North
Huntsville, TX 77320
Phone (936) 295-2155
Fax (936) 295-0205
www.tdcj.state.tx.us**

Vigils on Execution Days Statewide

Huntsville-Corner of 12th and Ave. I (in front of Walls Unit) at 5:15 p.m.

Austin -On Lavaca St. between 10th and 11th St. from 5:30 to 6:30 PM.

Beaumont - Diocese of Beaumont, Diocesan Pastoral Office, 703 Archie St.

@ 4:00 p.m. on the day of an execution.

College Station - 5:30 to 6 PM, east of Texas A&M campus at the corner of Walton and Texas Ave.

Corpus Christi -Sisters Of Incarnate Word Convent, 2930 Alameda, 6:00pm

Cuero - At Gazebo on Main Street, next to library, 5:45 pm. Public Invited. For info call 361-676-2921

Dallas - 5:30 pm, at the SMU Women's Center, 3116 Fondren Drive

Edinburg - 5:30 PM in front of the Hildago County Courthouse

El Paso - first Wednesday of every month, from noon to 1 p.m., in front of the El Paso County Courthouse.

Ganado - At Assumption Catholic Church Pro-Life Monument, 5:45 PM. Public invited. For info call 361-771-3325.

Houston -St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, on W. Alabama between Woodhead and Hazard at 5:30 p.m.

McKinney - Last Saturday of the month, St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Community located at 110 St. Gabriel Way @ 6:00 p.m.

San Antonio - Archdiocese of San Antonio, in the St. Joseph Chapel at the Chancery, 2718 W. Woodlawn Ave. at 11:30 a.m. on the day of execution. Broadcast on Catholic Television of San Antonio (Time-Warner cable channel 15) at 12:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. on the day of execution.

Spring - Prayer Vigil at 6 PM at St Edward Catholic Community, 2601 Spring Stuebner Rd, Spring, TX 77389

Victoria - Incarnate Word Convent, 5:45 PM. Public Invited. For info 361-575-7111.

Martin's Draughon's death sentence was recently overturned and he was given a 40 year sentence. Martin was visited by a parole officer at the county jail where he'd been awaiting news and he learned that he is scheduled to be paroled on AUGUST 25th...2006! "I was in no way prepared to receive that phone call. My sister and I were on the phone at the same time. I absolutely lost it. I was so overcome, I was delirious, to say the least. I couldn't stop screaming. I don't remember a whole lot other than I couldn't even see because my eyes were full of tears and 20 years of fear and anxiety that I'd have to watch him be executed being lifted off of my shoulders. The idea that I'm actually going to get to hug him again after 20 years is just too much to wrap my brain around. Needless to say, we are all planning a trip to Houston to be there for the day he is released. Thank you again to all of Martin's friends and to my friends out there who I probably haven't spoken to in forever, but know you would like to know that my nightmare has finally ended. Life is going to be good. I know that Martin will acclimate well into society and have no worries about his future." — Felicia Draughon, speaker at 2005 TX Journey of Hope Send support donations to ALP Ministries, 309 N. Drew St., Livingston, TX 77351 or www.alllifeisprecious.org—paypal (All donations for Martin need to be noted they are for him.)

Brothers must DRIVE to better prison conditions

by K. Foster

Fighting against the death penalty, and the conditions created on death row from it, is an intricate thing. Amongst all the diverse prisoners there will be as many diverse opinions on what to do to fight the powers that be, but that is not necessarily a bad thing, for as the saying goes, "It's more than one way to skin a cat."

As we (DRIVE) have protested, we've encountered numerous critiques, but nevertheless, through our serious actions (inside and outside), we've found just as much support. One thing we've passionately expressed is prisoners do not have to get physical, or go to level 2 or 3, to protest what they're displeased with. The pen CAN be mightier than the sword. Behind every army is an even more powerful mind. It's time we started to utilize ours in a politically active way.

One of the biggest defense tactics by this Administration has been to exclaim that barely any death row inmates complain. It's been repeatedly said that we (DRIVE) are the only ones complaining; that these "bad conditions" are just our opinions. Propaganda or not, inactivity has been a problem of ours for

over 6 years now.

I believe that when one becomes silent about the things that matter they stop living. For those that are content with how things are here-fine. But, for those that are not content they MUST begin to speak out! None of this is easy. You must be persistent. Change won't come with a few months of protesting or grievance filing. It takes time. I understand how one finds solace through books, magazines, sports on the radio, but if we don't recognize what's being done to us then one day we'll look up and that'll be taken away too.

We stress that activism must be on the outside and inside to completely defeat the death penalty. There are people out there with these groups who work, go to school, raise families AND help us. But, we have to help ourselves just as much. And if we don't, why should they?

I'm going to lay out a few things this administration said (around December 2005) they'd be doing for death row. While most of it has not been done, we plan to stay pursuing these issues until they are:

-Add new lining in the showers to make them

easier to clean

-Add an extra storage space for Truck day so that our items don't run out so quickly

-Get a new laundry supervisor with a better process of bleaching and preventing torn and dirty items from being passed out

-A "faith based pod" to be designated for those that are SERIOUS about wanting to be in this type of environment to pursue their spiritual path

-Better pod-dayroom-shower clean up

-Roof contract for 2007, but in the meantime cells that leak were to be caulked (we must demand that no person be forced to live in a cell that leaks)

Three things have started to take place:

-Nets are being put at the top of the rec. yards to keep the birds from roosting at the top. At the time of this writing they are up on A pod

-The food has slightly improved

-Through the bravery of an officer, prisoners are now coming to the dayrooms on Sunday to clean. This began as a trial period on A Pod. I would ask that anyone that does go to the

dayroom to go in there and clean and make no mess of this opportunity that has been given to us.

I give credit where credit is due, but these are the only things that I can give credit for. Nevertheless, we continue to face a foul mail room process. So, as you can see, we can never rest.

If you have an interest in seeing these things carried out then repeatedly send in I-60's and make it known you are aware of what's supposed to be done; address rank when you see them, have your people/pen pals call or write about these things.

Put your pens to work. This administration does not think you care about your conditions, thus why they treat you like they do. Why should they give you anything if you're not fighting for it?

On a personal note— please understand this—We do not have to embrace being subjected to neglect just because we are on death row. This will never be a Holiday Inn, but we can have better. I've said it once and I'll say it a thousand times—It's on US, nobody else, to create the change.

Be the change you wish to see.

Austin Chapter... Steve Hall of Project StandDown Texas spoke at the quarterly meeting held in June. Steve presented an early look at the next general session of the Texas legislature and potential bills that might be of interest to individuals interested in the issue of capital punishment. He also identified several political races in the state where the contests could be considered up for grabs, including some in the Austin area.

The Austin chapter is currently working with the Office of Social Concern of the Catholic Diocese of Austin to encourage parishes in the diocese to participate in the National Weekend of Faith in Action (October 20-22) sponsored by Amnesty International USA. The Office of Social Concern will send a letter to all 120 parishes in the diocese asking that they participate in the weekend in some way. The letter will include several suggestions for the parishes as well as the Amnesty International USA brochure for the weekend, the brochure from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty, and the TCADP Speaker's Bureau brochure. Quarterly Meeting coming shortly

Bryan/College Station Chapter... Rich Woodward and Marie Leonard went to Somerville on Saturday, 29th of July to represent TCADP-BV and present our material on DP issues at the Somerfest festival. We had a booth (table) with flyers and other material. This was more of a "fun" 'music-food-kids'corner-arts&crafts' kind of event, so we knew it was going to be a "tough crowd"...but we did get a good response as far as people engaging with us (whether pro or con) and taking home some material to read and think about the wrongfulness of capital punishment.

Marie had a conversation with a man who told her his story about how he changed his mind regarding the death penalty. He basically said he was 100% pro-death penalty until he was called for jury duty: He was on a jury in Galveston (capital case, murder trial), and when he saw how the trial was conducted and how things went down, he was completely disgusted by the whole process, the unfairness and ugliness made him change his mind and be against the death penalty. So there's hope!!!!

North Texas Chapter (Dallas/Ft. Worth)... will be holding its next meeting on Wed., Sept. 20, in Dallas Hall, at SMU, 7-9 pm.....we will be discussing the upcoming (Oct.) Amnesty International National Weekend of Faith in Action (NWFA) and beginning our outreach follow-up to various communities of faith....we will also be discussing a fundraiser, as well as media outreach and area university outreach to students interested in the death penalty issues prior to the onset of the Texas legislature in January.

El Pasoans Against the Death Penalty... to observe the Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty, is planning to visit, in person, the leaders of 22 faith communities in El Paso. They will also send information to the 30 Catholic parishes. Newsletter editor Wayne Daniel, has designed a brochure with four quotations from the great religions on the cover. Inside are six points against the death penalty, on the back, a list of possible activities for a congregation to do, and, for the Catholic parishes, a statement from the bishop. Members will make their visits the weeks of September 18 and 25. In the past, faith leaders have sometimes said that we started to late for them, because we began in October.

The group is looking forward to viewing at the next meeting, a gift from Diocesan EPADP liaison, Sr. Kathleen Judge. The beautiful and moving 15-minute DVD, "A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death" is based on a statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Order from the website, USCCB "Publications" "Browse" Cost: \$9.95.)

Our local NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) has signed on with the national NAMI resolution against the execution of mentally ill persons (found on website). We're looking into having more local "sign on's" to national statements - Knights of Columbus, faith groups, etc. so we can present these to the legislature and to our local lawmakers.

CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES: All men and women are sinners. (Romans 3:23)

HEBREW SCRIPTURES: Is it my desire that a wicked person shall die?—says the Lord God. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways and live. (Ezekiel 18:23)

THE QUR'AN: If God were to punish for sin, there would be no one left on earth. (Fatir, 45)

THE FIRST PRECEPT OF BUDDHISM: I will be mindful and reverential with all life. I will not be violent nor will I kill.

Chapter News cont. pg 7

Check out the TCADP website! www.tcadp.org

It has several exciting new features.

Chapters also have new e-mail addresses, so please take note!

Want to receive email alerts or the newsletter via email?

Send your name and email address to info@tcadp.org

Visit your Texas State Legislators—NOW!

by Bob Van Steenburg

All opponents of capital punishment are urged to visit their Texas state legislators over the next 90 days and tell them that the capital punishment system in this state is an unfair process that neither protects the innocent nor punishes the all of the guilty. We suggest that rather than discussing the issues of morality, race, or deterrence (all of which have opposing viewpoints and frequently have strong feelings attached), focus on the facts that show that this system is another example of a poorly administered government program that does not accomplish what it was designed to do. **Listed on page 6 at the conclusion of this article are “talking points” that support this view.** It is also suggested that you do this as an individual citizen, a constituent of your legislator’s district, and not as a TCADP member. Often use of the word “abolition” will cause listeners to immediately tune out to the rest of the message you have to say.

Your legislators are generally more available now than they are during the legislative session. They are more likely to be in their home districts RIGHT NOW and they do not have the crush of activities that they have during the legislative session. And YOU, as a constituent have not only the right to meet with your legislative member, but almost the duty to tell him or her how you feel about various issues. Below is information about how to contact and develop a relationship with members of the legislature. **So, get out there and meet these individuals who represent you in the business of state government. Send word of your meetings to austin@tcadp.org & info@tcadp.org.**

HOW TO MEET AND DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR STATE LEGISLATOR

Know your elected officials. First, do you know who your Texas state legislators are? There is one in both the House and the Senate who represent you. If you don’t know who represents you here is how you learn who your elected officials are in the Texas state legislature.

- On the internet go to www.capitol.state.tx.us, On the left menu select **Who represents me?**
- Type in your address as requested, Select **Submit**

Know about your elected officials. To learn about your legislative member, such as bills he/she has sponsored, contact info

- On the internet go to www.capitol.state.tx.us, Select either **House of Representatives** or **Senate**
- Select **Members**, Select your member’s name
- Here you will learn how to contact his/her offices, committee assignments and bills authored or sponsored.

Face to face visits are the most effective. While letters and even email messages are helpful in letting your representatives know what you think, nothing is better than a face to face meeting. This is by far the best method to get your message across. It also gives you the opportunity to hear the member’s thoughts and thus organize your comments and ideas for future meetings. Plus, after meeting you, when the member sees you at a committee hearing he or she will know your concerns.

Find common ground where you and your representative agree. Begin any contact by thanking your representative or praising him/her for some work that he/she has done that you appreciate, where you believe that the representative worked in your interest. This sets a tone of respect and a positive relationship with the member.

Be specific in your request. Have one or two specific actions that you want the member to take. Having a long list of items or being vague and non-specific does not really tell the member what your most important concerns are. Be focused.

Keep things simple. Make your points very understandable. Encapsulate your thoughts into a brief statement. Prioritize your issues. Be clear and to the point.

Don’t become combative or threatening. Even if the member does not agree with you, do not become argumentative. Always be polite. You will never win friends (or votes) by being rude, threatening, or combative.

Use appropriate and sensitive language. Don’t use terms that can be labeled as “conservative” or “liberal”. Use terms and words that are not value laden. Always state the truth. Do not shade it; do not try to alter it. If you are asked a question and do not know the answer, say so, and then promise to get back with the answer (this also sets up another conversation).

Don’t assume the member knows about the issue. Break the issue down into small, manageable ideas or subsets. This provides you the opportunity to educate the member on the issue.

Visit those who disagree with you as well as with those agree with you. Not everyone will think as you do. Whether you like or voted for the individuals who represent you in the legislature is not the issue. They are still the ones who represent you and you must talk to them. Even, and perhaps more importantly, the opposition needs to hear your thoughts.

The staff is important. The members of the legislator’s staff are the key to the member. They have access to and influence with the member. They can be very helpful—or a roadblock. When you talk with the staff you are talking to the member. Provide them the same courtesy and information that you give to the legislator.

Cont. on pg. 6

Prepare a "leave behind" packet. Develop a one-page summary of your issue: what the key points are, what your specific request is of the member, how you can be contacted for any follow up or additional information.

Thank the member and the staff. Always thank those who took time to listen to you or help you in any way. It is important to say "Thank you" as you leave the meeting. Also, follow up with a note or phone call later, again to say thanks. And also with regards to follow up, provide copies of articles, etc, that you see on the issue, to the staff member who was most helpful to you, as a way to keep your issue before the member.

Help in the election. Consider working for the election of those who represent you in the legislature. This will give you significant opportunities to meet and get to know the member (or candidate). It also provides you additional recognition and credibility.

Talking Points for Visiting with State Legislators



1. The use of the death penalty as a means to provide justice in Texas is a poor government system.
 - A. It is prone to error. Recent newspaper articles have presented three cases where Texas has probably executed an innocent individual
 - Carlos De Luna, 1989
 - Ruben Cantu, 1993
 - Cameron Willingham, 2004
 - B. Eight individuals have been released from Texas' death row based on factual innocence of the crime for which they were convicted. At the same time, we have executed more than 365 people. One example of those exonerated:
 - Ernest Willis, who was released from death row in 2004 spent 17 years in prison.
 - C. The death penalty process is biased against those who rely on some form of indigent defense. The quality of defense is linked directly to the amount of money that the defense has to spend on investigation, expert witnesses, issues of mitigation, etc.
 - Capital defendants who were represented by lawyers appointed by the state are 28% more likely to be convicted and 44% more likely to be sentenced to death than capital murder defendants who have the resources to retain their own lawyers. (pg. 83, *Executed on a Technicality*, David R. Dow)
 - D. The death penalty process is arbitrary.
 - The decision as to which capital cases to seek the death penalty varies from county to county, and is often linked to the cost of prosecuting a death penalty case.
 - Co-defendants often are treated differently for the same crime.
 - E. The system presents many opportunities for mistakes to be made.
 - Mistaken eyewitness testimony - Ruben Cantu (executed in 1993) was convicted on the basis of a single eye witness who has recanted his testimony.
 - Errors or incorrect testimony by "Expert Witness" - Cameron Willingham (executed in 2004) was convicted largely on the testimony of an arson expert whose analysis has been discredited.
 - Suppression of exculpatory or mitigating evidence - In 1990 Clarence Brandley was released after spending 9 years on death row when the courts included, among other findings, that the state had suppressed exculpatory evidence during the trial.
 - Misinterpretation of evidence.
 - Tainted testimony by a "jailhouse snitch" - Testimony in the trial of Anthony Graves (convicted and sentenced to death in 1994) included supposed statements by other inmates that have been discredited.
2. We should not continue any program that has been shown to be as error prone as this one is.
3. The Texas Legislature should enact legislation that provides for a fair system of justice in the state.

Go to www.tcadp.org/lawmakers.php to print out a copy of these talking points to take and leave with your legislators and their staff for your visit.

Remember....always be courteous! And include your contact information on the talking points!

TCADP Chapter News Cont.

Houston Chapter... in recent meetings has discussed greater contact with local legislators regarding abolition of the death penalty. We plan to point out to legislators that public opinion is shifting away from the death penalty as shown by Dr. Steven Klineburg's recent "Houston Survey" which showed that 60% of Houstonians would prefer a long prison sentence (life without parole or parole possible after 25 years served) vs. 30% preferring the death penalty for capital murder.

The Houston Chapter is also working on an educational program with slides which is based on the TCADP presentation at the Houston Social Forum. The goal is to have a program that many people can present.

The Houston Chapter recognized the 30th Anniversary of Gregg vs. Georgia, by making a presentation on two KPFT radio shows.

Members participated in the Andrea Pia Yates Support Coalition. Although the death penalty was no longer a punishment option for Andrea, it was felt to be important to highlight our belief that people with severe mental illness should receive treatment for their condition rather than punishment.

Rio Grande Valley Chapter...



...is holding vigils! Go Valley! A picture is worth a thousand words! Kerry Max Cook has also been invited to speak at several

venues in the area this fall. Watch for an announcement and come on out!

Victims of Texas... is bringing **Shujaa Graham** back to Texas (He participated in the Texas Journey of Hope in October, 2005.), in mid to late September, 2006. If you would like to Host Shujaa for a speaking engagement please leave a message for Christina at VOT, 830-620-4157. Hosting Shujaa would require you to provide housing, transportation, and food support for him while he is assisting you. Shujaa Graham was convicted of murder and sent to the San Quentin Death row in 1976. After 4 subsequent trials he was able to prove his innocence and he was released in March of 1981. TCADP may also be able to assist with expenses.



Carol Byars gave unselfishly of her time to the abolition movement. Her story as a murder victim family member moved many people to see that the death penalty does not honor the victim or bring healing. After Carol's passing, there are still many outstanding medical bills. If you can help with a donation please send to...

Sarah Chambers, 11826 Padok, Houston, TX 77044

Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation www.mvfr.org

Austin

Bob Van Steenburg
(512) 258-6480
austin@tcadp.org

Beaumont

Bob Mark
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beaumont@tcadp.org

Brazos Valley

Richard Woodward
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Corpus Christi

Jeanne Adams
(361) 882-1133
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Dallas/Ft. Worth

Rick Halperin
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El Pasoans Against the DP

Carol Tures, Kathleen Judge
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elpaso@tcadp.org

Houston

Nancy Bailey
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Lubbock

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San Antonio

Roger Barnes
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Rio Grande Valley—NEW!

Sylvia Garza
riogrande@tcadp.org

TX Moratorium Network

info@texasmoratorium.org

Victims of Texas

Christina Lawson
(830) 620-4157
victimsoftexas@tcadp.org

Victoria (Agape Chapter)

Sr. Elizabeth Riebschlaeger
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victoria@tcadp.org

The Coalition for Truth and Justice, CFTJ...an international partner



Chairwoman : Myriam Stubbe

My first meeting with the death penalty was a very long time ago when I was still a teenager... Caryl Chessman's execution in California. Very soon after this I started to work with human rights' associations. My struggle was inactive for many years when I got married and had my children. 15 years ago, I started again to work with Amnesty Belgium's department "death penalty in the USA"... Although a valued organization, I am no longer actively involved as CFTJ is my absolute priority.

By accident I wrote to a Texas inmate who suggested that the best way to fight the death penalty would be to create an association. In 1999, I created the CFTJ, a registered non-profit association with its headquarters in Belgium.

The association is run by me as chairwoman, and **Bonnie Caraway** as Texas director, with the help of 10 board members in England, France and Italy. We very recently opened an office in England that is run by **Sandra Knowles**. Our main focus is, of course, the abolition of the death penalty worldwide but we work mainly in America supporting our American abolitionist friends, with petitions, letters etc.

We have around 280 members who subscribe to our newsletters that are translated into French four times a year. We encourage inmates to write articles that we publish in this newsletter, which of course gives them an outlet for their views, and their voice can be heard. We are also helping death row inmates find pen pals who can support them through friendship. Our site has special pages for death row inmates and is updated daily. Many inmates have found Pen Friends this way.

I travel twice a year mainly to Texas to visit my friends on the row. And I'm proud to say that I "harassed" the mayor of my city so much, that "Braine l'Alleud" is today the first Belgian city to be a member of the World Coalition to Abolish the death penalty.

In Belgium we go in to high schools and colleges to educate the students about death penalty. Even if we don't have that horror anymore in Europe, it is a necessity that we educate people on this subject with the hope to bring about change worldwide. Education is the best way forward to avoid ever returning to such barbaric forms of punishment. We also give conferences on the death penalty, conditions the men live under and what effect it has on them.

We do not raise money nor do we ask for donations. Nevertheless we are the go-between for our members when they want to financially support their friends on the row.... We don't sell art work and we don't collect money for defense funds.... Instead where appropriate we do ask people to help the lawyers defender services.

We as an organization have to stay modest because we know that our association is, and has to stay, a moral support to death row inmates and that changes have to come from America itself. A struggle must come from inside and not from outside. That's why we try to be not only the voice of the inmates but also to support the American associations fighting against the death penalty.



United Kingdom Director : Sandra Knowles

Unlike my two colleagues I have not been involved with issues surrounding the death penalty for that long. Around 18 months ago I saw an advertisement in a University newsletter that was telling me about an organisation here in the UK that wanted Pen Friends to write to inmates on Death Row..... this advertisement changed my life.... From that point I have been writing and have visited Texas Death Row twice and am planning my third visit. I guess coming from the UK the issue surrounding capital punishment was not apparent before..... I have read widely on the subject and still feel that there is a fight to be fought against this cruel and unusual punishment. Yes, I believe that even though capital punishment was reinstated by the 1976 Supreme Court decision (Gregg vs. Georgia) it still remains and will always continue to be cruel and unusual.....



USA Director: Bonnie Caraway

I first became interested in the death penalty after something happened to affect my own family. The more I saw of the judicial system in Texas the more I knew that it was very wrong. The state was prepared to execute my son for a crime he had nothing to do with and would have executed him, more than likely, if the killer himself had not told the truth. Then I began searching for other cases like ours and was shocked to see that when I was thinking there could only be a handful, 25% of the inmates on death row did not belong there... I feel in the 7-8 years that I've been doing this work, the count has grown..

I want to do everything I can for these men or women that have been put on death row to suffer, and await their death. It is inhumane..

The executions I have gone through have showed me that there are other victims in these wrongful convictions. Families are dragged through this and nearly destroyed because of it.

Helping these people hasn't been easy.. not at all. But it is fulfilling. Each time I bring a smile to a face that is full of fear, I get my reward..

Even in the worst case scenario, if the person is guilty...I have met some that could be rehabilitated without a doubt. Killing them is wrong.

Letters can be so important to inmates. Friendship is most worthy. Giving our time with our association has become my life's goal.

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Death Penalty Champ - Texas, Does Not Let Innocence Deter its Enthusiasm for Executions!

by David Atwood

George W. Bush once said that he did not believe that an innocent person was among the people executed while he was Governor of Texas. To my knowledge, similar claims have not been made by Ann Richards who preceded Bush or Rick Perry who succeeded him. Fifty executions occurred under Richards, 152 under Bush and 134 under Perry as of 8/17/06. Altogether, Texas has executed 373 people since executions were resumed in the state in 1982, making it the undisputed death penalty champ. Virginia, the state with the most executions after Texas, comes in a distant second with 97 executions as of 8/17/06.

During the past year, three men have risen from the grave with information that they may be innocent of the crime for which they were put to death: Carlos De Luna, executed in 1989, Ruben Cantu, executed in 1993 and Cameron Todd Willingham, executed in 2004. Actually, questions of innocence with regard to Cantu were the result of investigative reporting by the Houston Chronicle, while questions of innocence in the De Luna and Willingham cases were the result of investigative reporting

by the Chicago Tribune.

These claims of innocence are a bitter pill to take for those Texas politicians who are strong supporters of the death penalty. They claim that the Texas death penalty system works perfectly fine as opposed to Illinois where a study commission recommended 85 improvements to its criminal justice system after a number of innocent people were discovered on its death row. Because of concern with the fallibility of the Illinois criminal justice system, Governor George Ryan declared a moratorium on executions, pardoned several men and commuted to life the sentences of the remaining people on Illinois death row before he left office. You can rest assured that such bold action has never been contemplated in Texas, which prides itself on the efficiency of its execution machinery. In fact, Texas cannot find the wherewithal to even conduct a thorough investigation when a case of possible innocence is revealed. After all, such a study might conclude that an innocent person has been executed and the Texas system isn't so perfect after all.

Are the De Luna, Willingham and Cantu cases the

only innocence cases of concern in Texas? The plain answer is "no". Defense attorneys will point to a number of other cases where there were strong claims of innocence. A good example might be Odell Barnes Jr., who was executed on George W. Bush's watch. One piece of evidence that linked Barnes to the crime was a spot of blood on his clothing that matched the blood of the victim. As Barnes' execution date neared, his appeals attorneys had this spot of blood carefully contained a chemical that is used to preserve blood in a test tube. If the blood had come directly from the victim, it could not have contained the chemical. Anyone can speculate on how the blood got on Barnes' clothing. This potential exculpatory evidence was uncovered after Barnes' conviction, but was not allowed to be presented in court because of the passing of established deadlines in the process. Barnes was executed on March 1, 2000.

De Luna, Willingham, Cantu and Barnes are not the only people executed in Texas who have strong claims of innocence. Similar claims have been made for Gary Graham, David

Wayne Spence, James Lee Beathard, David Stoker, Richard Wayne Jones, Robert Drew, Leonel Herrera and others. One cannot say for sure that all these people were innocent. However, one can say with certainty that Texas has never had the courage or integrity to establish an independent commission to research these claims of innocence.

Recently U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonia Scalia challenged his colleagues to present one case where DNA evidence had shown that an innocent person had been executed. Personally, I don't believe that DNA should be the only criteria for making a claim of innocence. DNA evidence is not available in a lot of murder cases. Most people have been convicted on other evidence. If an official post-execution review shows that an innocent person was executed, that should be good enough for Justice Scalia and other death penalty proponents. It should also be good enough evidence to shut down the death penalty apparatus of this country once and for all. Perhaps that is why Texas officials prefer to avoid the issue altogether.



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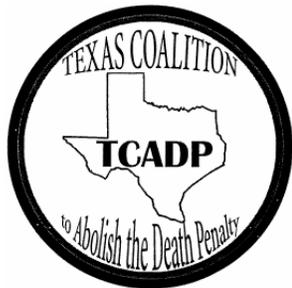
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