

OPINION

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Letters to the Editor Unworkable Model

Thank you for covering the controversy over House Bill 3274 (Medical Marijuana Debate, March 18 issue) which would establish a state monopoly medical marijuana garden.

This bill points out a big problem with the current medical marijuana law - lots of patients can't obtain the medicine, but it proposes an unworkable model.

First, pharmacies can't dispense marijuana under federal law and second, a state monopoly will produce miserable results - there are many examples of this. Most importantly any effort to recriminalize medical marijuana patients, as the bill does, would be an unbelievably expensive boondoggle.

There is another proposal to create a regulated medical marijuana supply system and that's Initiative Petition 28, which is also introduced as Senate Bill 812. This proposal creates state-regulated, nonprofit medical marijuana dispensaries and producers.

The Obama administration has indicated it will not prosecute such nonprofits if they follow state law. Initiative 28 will get patients the medical marijuana they need in a highly controlled setting. But it won't recriminalize the patients who can produce their own medicine.

Initiative 28 will also generate millions of dollars in revenue for the health department, and create a regulated program to assist indigent patients in obtaining their medicine.

We hope the Legislature will create a workable medical marijuana supply system. If not we will continue petitioning to put Initiative 28 on the November 2010 ballot. We already have 30,000 signatures and polls show this initiative will pass.

John Sajo
Director, Voter Power



Happy Birthday - 3 Generations



Rose L Trice
79 years old

Miracle Trice-Barber
9 years old

Love from your family
Thank you

DNA Testing should be a Right

Let's hope the Supreme Court agrees

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Imagine being convicted of a crime you didn't commit and languishing in prison for 11 years until new DNA evidence proved your innocence. That's just what happened to Ronald Cotton whose story was recently told on CBS' 60 Minutes.

Cotton's accuser, Jennifer Thompson, was absolutely certain she correctly identified the man who broke into her Burlington, N.C. apartment and raped her on the night of July 28, 1984. But she was wrong.

Her mistake produced more than one other victim of that brutal crime - Ronald Cotton, an innocent man who was sentenced to life in prison, and several other women who were raped by the real criminal who remained free.

What finally turned the tide in Cotton's case was the science of DNA testing which Cotton's lawyer was allowed to use to prove his client's innocence. The real crime is

that hundreds of wrongly convicted people are now behind bars, not only because of eyewitness flaws, but also because of the refusal by a small number of states to allow DNA evidence to be used to prove



There is no good reason to deny prisoners the right to DNA testing if it can prove their innocence, identify the guilty and prevent a tragic miscarriage of justice.

their innocence.

According to the 60 Minutes report, there have been 233 people exonerated by DNA evidence across the country. More than 75 percent of them were convicted because of mistaken identity.

Ronald Cotton was one of the lucky ones.

Timothy Cole of Lubbock, Texas was not so fortunate. He was sentenced to 25 years in 1985 after being wrongly identified by a rape victim. In

1999, Cole died in prison before DNA testing and the jailhouse confession of another inmate later cleared his name.

According to the Innocence Project, a national nonprofit legal clinic dedicated to exonerating innocent people through DNA testing, there are thousands of prisoners desperate to have their cases evaluated.

Some of them are on death row. Most of them are poor, forgotten and have used up all legal avenues for relief. The hope they have is that biological evidence from their cases still exists and can be subjected to DNA testing.

Dallas County District Attorney, Craig Watson, the first African American District Attorney in Texas, has made this issue a centerpiece of his work.

Watson believes the DA's

job is not only about prosecuting the guilty, it is also about protecting the innocent.

That's why, in 2007 he established the Conviction Integrity Unit, the first division of its kind in the country dedicated to overturning wrongful convictions and securing the release of men and women who have been wrongfully imprisoned in Texas. His efforts have helped secure the release of more than 19 wrongfully convicted prisoners thus far.

Unfortunately, six states still deny prisoners access to DNA testing: Alaska, Alabama, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Mississippi and South Dakota. The Supreme Court is now deliberating an Alaska case that could grant all prisoners that right. We believe that's what the court should do.

In a nation that prides itself on the rule of law, there is no good reason to deny prisoners the right to DNA testing if it can prove their innocence, identify the guilty and prevent a tragic miscarriage of justice.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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Inspirational Leadership Takes Initiative

New Mexico repeals the death penalty

BY BENJAMIN TODD JEALOUS

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and the state Legislature made the right decision last week in repealing capital punishment. The governor's inspirational leadership is an exemplar of the intersection of morality and wise governance that serves our nation well.

We congratulate our NAACP New Mexico State Conference and Sante Fe Branch that worked tirelessly to support the repeal. Their efforts helped result in a strong bipartisan vote in the



New Mexico legislature reflecting a growing consensus that the death penalty has failed the people of New Mexico.

They are joining millions of citizens nationwide who understand that capital punishment risks executing the innocent, is unfairly applied, fails victims' families and law enforcement and wastes scarce taxpayer dollars.

As Coretta Scott King once said, "As one whose husband and mother-in-law have both died as the victims of murder assassination, I stand firmly and unequivocally opposed to the death penalty for

those convicted of capital offenses. An evil deed is not redeemed by an evil deed of retaliation. Justice is never advanced in the taking of a human life. Morality is never upheld by legalized murder."

Coretta's prescient quote presaged a growing chorus of deep concern about the death penalty across the country.

In this time of fiscal crisis, it is more important than ever to make smart choices when it comes to meeting the needs of our citizens. By repealing the death penalty, New Mexico can now focus resources on the important issue of providing tangible assistance to the families of murder victims.

Additional measures will enable New Mexico to use the

savings gained from ending the death penalty to provide a reparation award to children of murder victims, provide services and programs to murder victims' families, create a murder victim family services fund and require employers to provide leave to crime victims to attend judicial proceedings.

Gov. Richardson and the state legislature are to be applauded for their moral courage. In doing so, they light a candle for smart crime policies for our entire nation. We sincerely hope that their enlightened leadership will clear a path for other states to follow.

Benjamin Todd Jealous is president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.

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