

LAW & JUSTICE

NAACP Takes Aim at the Death Penalty

Fights for repeal in key states

Motivated by the tragic execution of Troy Davis in Georgia last September, the NAACP has renewed its fight to make the death penalty a part of

America's past. Over the next year, state representatives of the civil rights group in several key states will urge their legislators to take the necessary steps to repeal the ultimate punishment.

"People in this country care about justice and fairness," said Benjamin Todd Jealous, NAACP president and chief executive officer. "Unfortunately, Troy Davis's case and too many other cases in our country demonstrate that these elements are sorely lacking in the application of capital punishment in this nation."

Jealous said, "African Americans and the poor are disproportionately handed this extreme punishment for the same offenses as their wealthier or white counterparts."



Benjamin Todd Jealous

While African Americans make up less than 13 percent of the total U.S. population, they compose 42 percent of those awaiting execution on death row, and 35 percent of defendants executed in the U.S. since 1976.

The FBI Uniform Crime Report from 2008 showed

that Southern states had the highest murder rate, but also accounted for over 80 percent of executions. Conversely, the Northeast, which has less than 1 percent of all executions, had the lowest murder rate.

"There is no evidence to show that the use of the death penalty prevents crime," said Ed Dubose, NAACP Georgia State Conference president.

Dubose also noted that the death penalty imposes an ultimate finality that cannot be reversed if innocence is later confirmed. More than one hundred inmates have been exonerated after being sentenced to death in the United States.

Advocates of repealing capital punishment have also argued that using the death penalty is fiscally irresponsible. Statistics provided by states with the death penalty indicate that the punishment can cost more than \$1 million more than the cost of a non-death penalty trial.

As Jealous suggested in a meeting with community leaders, "The resources saved from abolishing the death penalty could be used to pay for additional police officers to patrol the streets and for support services for victims of violent crimes."

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Dr. Billy R. Flowers (above center) and his skilled staff are ready to help those in need.

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Philip Morris to Pay Damages

The tobacco manufacturer Philip Morris has finally agreed to pay the remainder plus interest of a 1999 punitive damage award. As a result, the Oregon Department of Crime Victims' Compensation Fund will receive \$56 million.

"This was a historic win for the Department of Justice and for Oregon," said Attorney General John Kroger.

A portion of the money will be needed to fund crime victims programs, but a majority of the money will be available to help the Legislature deal with the budget deficit.

Under Oregon law, 60 percent of punitive damage awards go to

the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund.

In 1999, a Multnomah County jury ordered Philip Morris to pay \$79.5 million in punitive damages in a lawsuit brought by the family of a Portland cigarette smoker who died of cancer.

After more than a decade of appeals, the Oregon Supreme Court in December upheld Oregon's share of the award.

The Oregon Supreme Court rejected a request by Philip Morris attorneys to reconsider their decision and last week an attorney for the company said the tobacco manufacturer will pay.

Invasion Robbery at College

The Portland Police Bureau, in cooperation with Crime Stoppers, is seeking the assistance of the public to solve a home invasion robbery on the campus of Warner Pacific College.

On Dec. 19, at 3:05 a.m., police were called to the scene of the crime in the 2200 block of Southeast 66th Avenue. As officers were enroute, they received information that three black males with masks covering their faces entered the apartment and stole the victim's property at gunpoint and then fled the apartment on foot.

One of the suspects was armed

with a shotgun. None of four victims that were inside the apartment were injured.

Crime Stoppers is offering a cash reward of up to \$1,000 for information, reported to Crime Stoppers, that leads to an arrest in this case, or any unsolved felony, and you can remain anonymous.

Leave a Crime Stoppers tip online at crimestoppersoforegon.com, text CRIMES (274637) and in the subject line put 823HELP, followed by your tip, or call 503-823-HELP (4357) and leave your tip information.