

Opinion

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cator of who will and will not be executed has nothing to do with the circumstances of a crime or the findings of a jury. The only factor that determines whether someone sentenced to death in Oregon is actually executed is that they volunteer. The hard truth is that in the 27 years since Oregonians reinstated the death penalty, it has only been carried out on two volunteers who waived their rights to appeal.

"In the years since those executions, many judges, district attorneys, legislators, death penalty proponents and opponents, and victims and their families have agreed that Oregon's system is broken.

"But we have done nothing. We have avoided the question.

"And during that time, a growing number of states have reconsidered their approach to capital punishment given public concern, evidence of wrongful convictions, the unequal application of the law, the expense of the process and other issues.

"Illinois banned it earlier this year, ending a legacy

of faulty convictions, forced confessions, unreliable witnesses and incompetent legal representation. New Jersey abolished capital punishment after determining it had spent a quarter of a billion dollars on a system that executed no one. New Mexico recognized that the death penalty is neither an effective deterrent nor fair to victims' families burdened with lengthy trials and appeals and replaced it with a sentence of life without the possibility of parole.

"Today, in Oregon, we can no longer avoid the question. Last Friday, a death warrant was signed for another death row inmate, Gary Haugen. And again he has volunteered to die.

"He is just one of 37 inmates on death row today. Some have been there for over 20 years. They all have many years and appeals left before there is even a remote possibility of carrying out their death sentence. Two others have died of natural causes after more than a decade on death row. The reality is that Oregon's death row is an extremely expensive life prison term, likely several times more expensive that

the life terms of others who happen to have been sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole – rather than the death penalty.

"And while it may be convenient to blame lengthy and expensive death penalty trials and appeals on inmates "working the system," the truth is courts (and society) continue to reinterpret when, how and under what circumstances it is acceptable for the state to kill someone. Over time, those options are narrowing. Courts are applying stricter standards and continually raising the bar for prosecuting death penalty cases. Consider that it was only six years ago that the U.S. Supreme Court reversed itself and held that it is unconstitutional to impose capital punishment on those under the age of 18. For a state intent on maintaining a death penalty, the inevitable result will be bigger questions, fewer options and higher costs.

"It is time for Oregon to consider a different approach. I refuse to be a part of this compromised and inequitable system any longer; and I will not allow further executions while I am Governor.

"I do not make this decision lightly.

"It was the will of the voters in 1984 to reinstate the death penalty in Oregon. I respect that and, in fact, have carried out that will on two occasions. I have regretted those choices ever since – both because of my own deep personal convictions about capital punishment and also because in practice Oregon has an expensive and unworkable system that fails to meet basic standards of justice. Twenty-seven years after voters reinstated the death penalty it is clear the system is broken.

"To those who will inevitably say that my decision today compromises the will of the voters; let me point out that, in practice, it is the current system itself which compromises the will of the voters. I do not believe for a moment that the voters intended to create a system in which those condemned to death could determine whether that sentence would be carried out.

"I could have commuted Mr. Haugen's sentence – and indeed the sentences of all those on death row – to life in prison without the possibility of parole. I did not do so because the policy of this state on capital punishment is not mine alone to decide. It is a matter for all Oregonians to decide. And it is my hope – indeed my intention – that my action today will bring about a long overdue reevaluation of our current policy and our system of capital punishment.

"Personally, I favor replacing the death penalty with life in prison without the possibility of parole and will argue for that policy in any future debate over capital punishment in Oregon. Others will point to opportunities to speed appeals or change the criteria for death penalty cases. In any event we can no longer ignore the contradictions and inequities of our current system.

"I am calling on the legislature to bring potential reforms before the 2013 legislative session and encourage all Oregonians to engage in the long overdue debate that this important issue deserves. I am convinced we can find a better solution that keeps society safe, supports the victims of crime and their families and reflects Oregon values.

"Fourteen years ago, I struggled with the decision to allow an execution to proceed. Over the years I have thought if faced with the same set of circumstances I would make a different decision. That time has come."



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Reward offered for information on damage to trees

A reward is being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for criminal activity on Longview Timber property, off Scappoose-Vernonia Hwy. near milepost 14. The incident occurred either on the morning of Friday, November 11, or the early morning hours of Saturday, November 12, 2011. The damage to trees was estimated at approximately 14,000 dollars. Anyone with information regarding this incident should contact Sr. Trooper Robin May at 503-397-0325 ext. 43, or the Oregon State Police TIP line at 1-800-452-7888. Callers may remain anonymous. The reward is being offered by the Oregon Hunters Association-Columbia County Chapter and Longview Timber in cooperation with the Oregon State Police and Wildlife Division.

Vernonia Cares still serving...

Back to basics... these three simple words describe the efforts at Vernonia Cares food bank. We all need a shelter. Everyone is affected by the current economic crisis across the country and it is compounded, here in Vernonia, in the wake of last December's flood. Back to basics... helping local residents with food assistance. "We really stretch your donation through the Pacific Food Bank... approximately 14 cents... (dollars or food) stay... Vernonia Cares to help this community...



Children, including one, enjoyed the snow on Wednesday, Dec. 7, at Vernonia's Anderson Park.

is not... Over... purchase a... and a thirty-dollar donation... Over... are... that... flexible... item is food, therefore... is greatly needed. Vernonia Sentry is also helping by accepting "Check Stand Donations" through December... As always, it is 100 percent tax deductible. Vernonia Cares needs your...