

I am opposed to the death penalty. Below is an op-ed I submitted to and was published by the Portland Tribune.

## ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY IN OREGON

By

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Much has been said in recent weeks about the high financial cost of prosecuting death penalty cases in Oregon, and the cost of the imposition of such sentences. While these are valid considerations, the cost of death penalty cases has minor import compared to what the institution of death penalty cases says about Oregon and the rest of the states that allow for it.

The fact is the taking of a life by any government is cruel, and with the growing number of nations that have abolished the death penalty, the practice is becoming unusual. Many nations (such as Iran and North Korea) and a caliphate (ISIS) still impose the death penalty. We should not look to them for justification for the practice. Rather, we should look to our own criminal system, and what we aspire to be as a state and nation.

As a former prosecutor and public defender, I recognize that mistakes are made in the criminal courts, and national studies confirm the point. Since 1976, 1,440 individuals nationwide have been executed since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Since 1973, 156 individuals on death row have been exonerated and released, according to the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. How many of the more than 1400 inmates that have been executed since 1976 were innocent will probably never be known. One study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2014 suggests that 4.1 percent (or about 57 people) of the 1440 that have been executed (up to 2014) were innocent. Their families will likely never know justice should it be deserved, even posthumously. The courts do not usually spend time with post-conviction relief for the dead. The undeniable fact is the criminal system is not perfect; no human system can ever hope to be.

It has been advocated by Oregon prosecutors that Oregon's death row only contains guilty individuals; that Oregon does a better job. Oregon has been lucky, not better. According to The National Registry of Exonerations, 7 people convicted of murder and serving life terms in Oregon have been exonerated. How lucky those 7 are that they were not sentenced to death and executed before their innocence was determined. The fact is that Oregon's criminal court system, as well as the system in every other state, is fallible. Sooner or later an Oregon prosecutor, and jury, is going to make a big mistake that cannot be corrected. Not even one mistaken death is worth it the policy of imposing the death penalty. Given the system's fallibility, the last thing we should allow the State of Oregon to do is take the life of anyone.

Justice Anthony Kennedy once wrote: "When the law punishes by death, it risks its own sudden descent into brutality, transgressing the constitutional commitment to decency and restraint." It is time for Oregon to split ranks with ISIS, Iran, and North Korea on this issue, adopt the decent and restrained approach, and abolish the death penalty.