

Execute, again

The Anniston Star

January 5, 2009 Monday

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Section: OPINION

Length: 352 words

Body

As years go, 2008 did not bring death-penalty advocates many days of cheer. The eye-for-an-eye form of ultimate justice, halted in many states while awaiting a high-court ruling, took a figurative year off.

But the debate over the barbaric practice of state-sponsored executions is ramping up this winter. And our state - Calhoun County, too - is sure to become an early epicenter of the myriad and substantive arguments about America's continued use of capital punishment.

Last year, a significant number of scheduled executions was delayed while the U.S. Supreme Court examined a case concerning lethal injection, the method most death-penalty states use. Alabama was one of those states that placed a moratorium on executions; it executed no one in 2008, The Birmingham News has reported.

James Callahan, sentenced to death for the 1982 abduction and killing of Jacksonville State student Rebecca Suzanne Howell, is the first of five Alabama deathrow inmates whose executions have been rescheduled. Callahan, convicted of a horrible and senseless crime, is set to die on Jan. 15. Four others are scheduled for execution in Alabama by mid-May.

Attorney General Troy King, a staunch advocate not only of capital punishment but of expanding its use to other crimes, is getting his wish. The state of Alabama, with the nation's fifth-highest number of death-row inmates (205), is wasting scant time in returning to the execution business.

The debate over the death penalty is much larger than punishing the condemned Callahan, whose crime is cemented as one of the most heinous in Calhoun County's modern-day history. FBI statistics, The News reports, indicate that national murder rates have changed little during this decade. The U.S.'s use of the death sentence has neither stopped nor effectively slowed Americans from killing each other.

This nation, the world's most powerful and influential, must continue to reconsider the effectiveness and use of capital punishment. This critical debate should not cease just because 2009 looks to be a busy year in our death chambers. Civilized nations must seek a better way.

Notes

PUBLISHER: NewsBank Inc.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Execute, again

Journal Code: XAST

Subject: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT (96%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (90%); CRIME RATES (89%); SENTENCING (89%); SUPREME COURTS (78%); MURDER (78%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (78%); SETTLEMENTS & DECISIONS (77%); LITIGATION (77%); DECISIONS & RULINGS (77%); CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS (77%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (73%); CRIMINAL OFFENSES (73%); ATTORNEYS GENERAL (72%); VIOLENT CRIME STATISTICS (63%); gcrim Crime/Courts; gdeath Death Penalty/Capital Punishment; nedc Commentary/Opinion; gcat Political/General News; gcns Crime/National Security; ncat Content Types; nfact Factiva Filters; nfcpx FC&E Executive News Filter

Organization: SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES (57%)

Person: TROY KING (53%)

Geographic: ALABAMA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (94%); usal United States - Alabama; namz North American Countries/Regions; usa United States; uss Southern U.S.

Load-Date: January 6, 2009

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