

Minimum 30-year manslaughter term added to bill

By Paula Dittrock

During floor debate Wednesday about a bill to abolish capital punishment in Nebraska, senators voted to add an amendment making 30 years imprisonment the minimum punishment for a manslaughter conviction.

The bill, LB64 introduced by Omaha Sen. Ernie Chambers, is slated for more discussion today. A motion by Scotia Sen. Dennis Rasmussen to indefinitely postpone discussing the bill was defeated 28-17.

Omaha Sen. Neil Simon introduced the amendment which eliminates any possibility of parole for manslaughter convictions.

He said the "biggest concern" many people have about abolishing the death penalty is that they fear convicted murderers will walk the streets six or seven years after being sentenced.

The amendment does not prevent the pardons board from reducing the sentence, but Simon said this board has never commuted a life sentence to less than 30 years.

Pardons board

The pardons board consists of Gov. J. James Exon, Secretary of State Allen Beermann, and Attorney General Paul Douglas.

Chambers told legislators the board is making a "decision on which four lives hang." Four men now are waiting on death row. The execution dates for three are set for June 22, June 29, and July 1, he said.

"Right now there is a death penalty and I think it ought not to be," Chambers said. He said he had visited the penitentiary and nothing has been done to prepare the electric chair which Chambers claimed officials are hoping they will not have to use.

Chambers criticized Rasmussen and accused him of bringing the death penalty back to the state.

Claiming nobody wants to bear the responsibility of an execution, Chambers said legislators would be required to witness an execution which he described as "a dirty, horrid affair."

More than 35 countries and nine states have abolished capital punishment, he said.

Statement disputed

Sen. John DeCamp of Neligh disputed Chambers' statement that capital punishment does not deter crime.

DeCamp said that before capital punishment deters crime it must "be applied in such a way to make it certain" that the sentence will be enforced.

He said the way to add clout to the death penalty will be an amendment proposed by the Judiciary Committee during last year's session.

DeCamp did not introduce an amendment but waited to see if Rasmussen's motion to postpone discussion on LB64 carried.

Rasmussen proposed the motion, saying senators should "leave the law as it is and proceed with other business."

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Resignation

Washington—The House committee on assassinations, facing a life-or-death vote on the House floor, accepted the resignation of chief counsel Richard A. Sprague on Wednesday in an effort to save the panel. The House was to vote later on whether to renew the tenure of the committee, established to investigate the murders of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Uranus rings


Mountain View, Calif.—Five thin rings have been detected surrounding the mysterious planet Uranus, and scientists said Wednesday they constitute the first major structural discovery in the solar system in 50 years. Until the sightings, Saturn was believed to be the only one of the solar system's nine known planets to have such rings.

news digest

By The Associated Press

Tapes released

Santa Cruz De Tene-Rife, Canary Islands—Spanish officials agreed Wednesday to release tapes of the last exchanges among two Boeing 747 pilots and the airport tower here, giving investigators a record of events leading up to aviation's worst disaster. Authorities said the tapes would be flown to Washington at the request of Dutch and American officials.



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