

Lethal injection bill faces opposition in Legislature

By TODD ANDERSON
Assignment Reporter

Omaha Sen. Kermit Brashear's attempt to make lethal injection the state's method of execution was met with criticism from Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha during the Legislature's judiciary committee hearing Friday.

Though the committee took no action on LB1308, a bill which would change the method of public execution in Nebraska from electrocution to lethal injection, the bill incited lengthy debate between the two senators.

Brashear said his motive for proposing the bill stemmed from a concern for humanity after hearing Nebraskans speak at statewide public hearings last year.

He said lethal injection would be more humane not only for the sentenced prisoner, but also for those administering and witnessing the execution.

But Chambers, an opponent of the

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death penalty, said the bill would make it easier for death penalty supporters to accept the killing, not more humane.

"Isn't this bill's intent to prettify and sanitize the process?" he said during Brashear's presentation of the bill.

"The things that make us humans are supposed to be the things that separate us from animals," Chambers said. "It's not necessary for the state to kill any of its citizens to carry out its duties. Killing is something a civilized state cannot justify."

Brashear said he was comfortable with how the state chooses to maintain order.

"When an individual act takes someone's life, it's an irreversible, unalterable consequence," he said. "I'm comfortable with the imposition of the same circumstance on that person."

Harold W. Clarke, director of Nebraska Correctional Services, endorsed the bill.

Correctional Services is the department responsible for performing executions.

Larry Myers, an Omaha attorney, said he also favored the bill because it would eliminate a "repugnant" method of killing.

"We've all heard someone say 'I wouldn't do that to a dog,'" he said.

The National Humane Society and the American Veterinarian Society have banned electrocution of animals as a form of euthanasia because of the pain and suffering it inflicts on animals, he said.

Marilyn Felian, a representative for Nebraskans for Peace, and Christy Hargesheimer of Amnesty International both said LB1308 was an attempt to change the appearance of state execution.

They said their organizations oppose the death penalty no matter what the means of execution are.

"All (LB1308) does is conceal the reality of cruel and unusual punishment," Felian said. "Whether it looks nice or not, a person is killed."

Bill would ban executing mentally retarded people

By TODD ANDERSON
Assignment Reporter

Though Nebraska has never knowingly executed a mentally retarded person, Sen. Don Wesely of Lincoln presented a bill Friday that would make execution of the mentally retarded illegal.

While presenting his bill to the Legislature's judiciary committee, Wesely said 30 mentally retarded people have been sentenced to death and executed in the United States since 1975, including six in 1995.

LB1266, the bill Wesely introduced, would make it illegal to execute a mentally retarded person in Nebraska. The judgment of mentally retarded people is so impaired that they can't be held accountable for crimes with a death sentence, Wesely said.

Most testifiers, including death penalty opponents and religious leaders, agreed it would be morally wrong to execute a mentally retarded person.

Thomas Riley, Douglas County public defender, said mentally retarded people have lower IQs than normal adults and operate at the mental level of a young teen-ager.

"A mentally retarded person never

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would be able to form the intent equal to that of an 18-year-old," he said.

The bill, if passed, could be used to defend prisoners currently on death row, Riley said, but it wouldn't create a surge of new appeals.

"If there are people on death row who fit the definition (of mental retardation), they shouldn't be there," Riley said. "(The bill) would create meritorious appeals, and people don't want that to happen."

Laurie Smith Camp, deputy attorney general, gave the only testimony in opposition to LB1266 on behalf of Attorney General Don Stenberg.

"The bill is unnecessary and gives rise to lengthy litigation," Camp said.

Camp would not say executing mentally retarded people was morally wrong.

"I believe it is an insult to mentally retarded people to say they can't be executed," she said. "They have the ability to tell between right and wrong."

The committee took no action on the bill.

All students invited to attend student government conference

By LINDSAY YOUNG
Assignment Reporter

Organizers of the Big 12 Black Student Government Conference want to make sure all students are invited to attend the events.

And Alisa Mosley, the conference's programming coordinator, said tickets are going fast.

The theme of the conference is "Black Love ... Restoring the Essence of the Black Family."

Members of Afrikan People's Union have been planning the event, which is Thursday through Sunday, for the past year.

People wishing to purchase tickets can contact Venetria Patton, APU adviser, at (402) 472-0249.

The Gospel Extravaganza, one of the conference's biggest events, will be in the Cornhusker Hotel Ballroom on Friday at 8 p.m. This event is free, but the party following the event costs \$15.

A step show will be held on Saturday at 9:30 p.m. in the Campus Recreation Center's NU Coliseum. It costs \$15.

A step show is a rhythmic dance performed by historically black fraternities and sororities, Leslie Bell, a conference logistics coordinator, said. A party following the step show costs \$15.

There will be a career and graduate school fair at the Ramada Plaza Hotel from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Friday.

Sixty-two recruiters are participating, Mosley said. A shuttle



will run from the Nebraska Union to the hotel.

All speakers will be at the Cornhusker Hotel. Anyone can buy tickets to see the following speakers:

■ Internationally known author and poet Nikki Giovanni will speak Thursday at 7 p.m. Her poetry has explored issues within the African American community and has touched on socio-political issues. Cost is \$10.

■ Dr. Julianne Malveaux, economist and syndicated columnist, will speak Friday at an 8 a.m. breakfast. Her research focuses on public policy, poverty in America, and the labor market and its effect on women and minorities. Cost is \$15.

■ George Fraser, founder and chairman of SuccessSource, focuses on excellence, economics and perceptions of African Americans. He will give a lecture and workshop Friday at an 11 a.m. lunch. The cost is \$20.

■ Dr. Cornel West, Harvard professor of religion and Afro-American studies, has conducted extensive research on leadership challenges, urban issues and the effects on African Americans and Jews. He will speak Saturday at 5:30 p.m. during a dinner. The cost is \$25.

■ Historians and authors Esra and Meira Kwesi will speak on Friday at 6:30 p.m. They are experts in African and African-American history, fashion and art. The cost is \$25.

The conference hotline for information is (402) 472-5397.

Kelley serves as adviser, leader

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to."

Kelley said implementing the forums were her greatest accomplishment while on the commission, because they were a way to "give voice to those who are not usually heard."

Goodwin said the chancellor's forums were just one example of Kelley's dedication.

Kelley was coordinator for a program that taught adolescent girls about the changes they will face in becoming women, and she also led many university multiculturalism workshops.

Her strength is her open ear, Goodwin said, and her ability to synthesize everyone's opinions into a solution.

Leslie Bell, a senior biochemistry major, said she could attest to the effectiveness of Kelley's communication approach.

Bell said when she took Kelley's African-American Women's Communication class, Kelley let the class lead discussions and was able to think on a student's level.

"One thing about Dr. Kelley is that it seems like whenever you need to know something or have a question she always seems to have the right thing to say all the time," said Bell, who also is an APU member.

Scholars as innovators

Kelley, who has been teaching intercultural communications for nine years, said the field asks how people are constructed by their beliefs and value system and then makes a "bridge to other people."

Professors who presume to be "intellectual" but fail to understand student concerns are not effective,

she said.

"My belief is that scholars need to be innovators," Kelley said. "I don't believe in scholars that sit up in the ivory tower."

And what makes a good teacher also makes a good leader, Bell said.

Bell said if she were to rate Kelley as a leader, on a scale of one to 10, she would get a 42.

You have to think

So what makes Kelley tip the leadership scale?

Kelley said because of her family and culture, she has never been satisfied with the notion that blacks don't belong in certain areas, such as education.

"My family was always one that believed in your thinking and activism," Kelley said. "Do something ... always be involved."

Kelley said when she was in school in the 1960s, she had no choice but to be an activist.

"As an undergrad I was always doing stuff out in the streets and learned about a lot of people," Kelley said. "You have to be involved in all kinds of things. You have to think and you have to do."

She learned the importance of this from her mother who always stressed education and hard work to her eight children.

Kelley received a bachelor of arts degree from the University of California-Berkeley and a master of arts degree from Howard University.

Her mother started college when Kelley was 5. When Kelley was in college, her mother got two master's degrees while working two jobs.

But when that way of life gets to be too much, Kelley said, she had to lean on people who have experienced what she has.

Sometimes she calls her friend Brenda, another university professor, for advice and a listening ear.

"They are treating me like a black woman again," Kelley said she tells her friend. "And she'll say, 'I know, I know.'"

Another person who keeps Kelley going is her 10-year-old son, Elias, who inspires her to work for a better racial climate wherever she is.

"I have to explain racism in a way he can understand it and how he can combat that," Kelley said. "I explain to him how glorious he is as a person and prepare him for when someone will try to take away his self."

Breaking shackles of the mind

Kelley said her biggest obstacle is the many people who think black people, especially black women, do not belong in certain areas like education or in high financial brackets.

Kelley said sometimes when she walks into a room of new students, some automatically do not perceive her as legitimate because of her skin color and gender. It is a challenge to be perceived as a part of the "human family," to which everyone belongs, Kelley said.

Although slavery and the unjust practices of the early 1900s are not as obvious today, Kelley said, racism is still alive.

"We have had body freedom for a long time, but the worst shackles have been on our minds," Kelley said.

Realizing those shackles exist at UNL, addressing them and seeing racism affects all UNL students is a goal Kelley has been - and will be - working toward in the future.

"A leader is supposed to help people see that and what is happening to them," Kelley said. "That is the biggest legacy I have."

CORRECTIONS

A story in Friday's Daily Nebraskan incorrectly identified Kelly Hoffschneider. He is chairman of the Campus Life Committee of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska.

A story in Thursday's Daily Nebraskan stated that one of COMMIT's party platforms is to create a Welcoming Environment for International Students committee. The party's platform is to create a more welcoming environment for international students.

Daily Nebraskan

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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