
NEXT KCDW MEETING MAR 26

Location: Hale's Alehouse.

Our speakers will be the Democratic legislators from the 23rd, 26th, and the 35th to update us on what happened during this last session. NO RSVP required.

THE TAX FUNDED DEATH MACHINE

by Jo Fox Burr

It is true that former Governor George Ryan is a Republican. He is also one of the 4 Illinois governors – out of the last 7 – to have gone to jail. Still he is a hero to me because, while governor, he undertook an extensive review of the death penalty process and, 3 days before the end of his term, determined he had to commute the sentences of all current death row inmates to life in prison. The speech he delivered announcing this provided incredibly well-reasoned arguments and included a notation that as a state legislator he had actually helped to enact a death penalty statute. For him, it was an amazing reversal. It seems that it wasn't until he was empowered by law to decide whether a death row inmate would live or die that he really fully understood the actual consequences of capital punishment.

What spurred Ryan to focus on this issue was that, through the efforts of some Northwestern University law students and professors, several death row inmates were exonerated during his tenure. As other disturbing facts concerning the capital punishment system were revealed in the press, he felt compelled to establish a commission to study it. He, himself, reviewed the cases of each death row inmate. Some facts revealed to him through this process deeply disturbed him. Several inmates had been represented by attorneys who had been suspended at some point or later disbarred. Two-thirds were African Americans. Of the approximate 1000 murders committed in 2002, only 2% of the convicted murderers received death sentences. Convicted first degree murderers were 5 times more likely to be sentenced to death in rural areas of Illinois than in Cook County because of an absence of uniform standards. In the states where the death penalty was abolished, homicide rates had not increased. He spoke with advocates on both sides of the issue, including Desmond Tutu, who told him that “to take a life when life has been lost is revenge, not justice.” Noting that putting someone to death was by far more costly than sending them to life in prison, he questioned whether this money could be better spent providing more services to the families of victims. Given the number of death row inmates exonerated, how could he ever be certain that Illinois would never execute an innocent person? As he wrestled with his conscience, he spent time visiting with the families of the victims as well as the families of the inmates, realizing that no matter what he decided, one side would be unhappy with him. Proposals he sent to the legislature to enact a fairer system were never passed. So in the end he determined that because of errors made in determining guilt, because of the lack of fairness in sentencing, and because of the inability to enact any semblance of reform, he had to act to commute all of the death sentences.

Governor Jay Inslee's courageous decision to refuse to sign any death warrants during his tenure has ignited a serious discussion on the editorial pages of the Seattle Times. On 2/23/2014, Brian Moran, a Kitsap County Prosecutor, argued that Jonathan Gentry, who was scheduled to be put to death this year for raping and murdering a 12 year old girl, was fairly sentenced and that this sentence was affirmed by the Supreme Court, which routinely analyzes all death penalties against all aggravated murder convictions to determine proportionality and fairness. Yet the editorial staff on 2/16/2014 noted that in 29 of our 39 counties, death penalties are not pursued because of either politics or cost. In Pierce and Spokane, death penalties are pursued about half of the time, while in King and Snohomish it is only pursued about a quarter of the time. This does not seem like fairness to me. U.S. Rep Reichert, on 3/11/2014, wrote about how the threat of the death penalty for Gary Ridgeway, the Green River killer, successfully got him to reveal the whereabouts of other women he murdered, bringing closure to many families. I'm glad these families got closure, but Ridgeway had something to leverage. What about

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those who don't?

For me the only justification for taking anyone's life is self-defense. To echo Desmond Tutu, I object to tax payer financed capital punishment because it involves me in committing planned calculated murder for the sole purpose of revenge, not justice. I grieve for murder victim families, but can revenge alone really bring them true peace?

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Kitsap County Democratic Women

Date: Mar. 26th (Wednesday)

Time: 11:30 a.m. lunch; 12:30 meeting.

Place: Hale's Alehouse

Speaker: Kitsap Dem Legislators

Kitsap County Democratic Central Committee

Date: Mar. 17th (Monday)

Time: 6:30 p.m. Desserts; 7:00 p.m. mtg

Place: Eagles Nest

23rd Legislative District Democrats

Date: Mar 25th (Tuesday)

Time: 6:30 social; 7:00 p.m. mtg.

Place: Poulsbo Library

26th Legislative District Democrats

Date: April 3rd (Thursday)

Time: 7-9 p.m.

Place: Kitsap Rm, Givens Center

1026 Sidney Rd, Pt. Orch

35th Legislative District Democrats

Date: May 3rd (Saturday)

Time: 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Place: N. Mason Timberland

Library Belfair

OTHER FUTURE EVENTS

Kitsap County Democratic Women's Picnic

July 12th (Sat.) at Jo Fox Burr's House

Kitsap County Democratic Central Committee Picnic

August 17th (Sun.) Jarstad Park, Gorst

Kitsap County Democrats Annual Dinner & Auction *formerly the Jefferson Jackson Dinner*

May 31st (Sat.) Olympic Coll., Brem. Ctr.

More information on all these events will be provided later.

"Because the Illinois death penalty system is arbitrary and capricious -- and therefore immoral -- I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death," - former Illinois Governor George Ryan

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