

CONSERVATIVES AND REPUBLICANS CALL FOR REPEAL OF NEBRASKA'S DEATH PENALTY

As conservative and Republican leaders in Nebraska, we come from a variety of perspectives and affiliations, but our core principles – limited government, fiscal responsibility, the right to life and liberty – unite us in our shared concerns about the death penalty. Rather than make us safer, capital punishment has proven to be a costly government program prone to error and abuse. In light of its track record, the prudent move for our state would be to replace the death penalty with the harsh punishment of life without possibility of parole.

There has been a dramatic shift among conservatives in understanding criminal justice policy, as many today question some of the costly and ineffective policies enacted in the 1980s and 1990s. Our concerns about the death penalty fit directly into this broader trend in the conservative world of taking a hard look at failed criminal justice policies.

More than ever, conservatives recognize that criminal justice policy must hold individuals accountable, protect the innocent, be responsive to victims' needs, spend taxpayer dollars responsibly, and be effective in reducing crime. We cannot turn a blind eye as the death penalty consistently falls short of these goals.

Since 1973, more than 149 individuals in the US have been sentenced to death before new evidence showed that they were wrongfully convicted and exonerated them. Other executions have gone forward despite compelling evidence that the condemned may have been innocent. It is difficult to imagine a greater abuse of government power than it executing one of its own citizens who is innocent. It also is difficult to reconcile a policy that poses such risks with a culture that truly values life.

This risky policy has not made Americans safer. There continues to be no evidence that the death penalty reduces crime, as murder rates in states without the death penalty are lower than states with it. Taxpayers ultimately bear the burden for this ineffective policy. Repeatedly, studies have shown capital cases are many times more costly than similar cases in which the death penalty is not sought.

The death penalty's potential impact on murder victims' families also raises concerns. As a result of past mistakes and wrongful convictions, capital cases today involve lengthy trials and appeals. Rather than address the needs of murder victims' families, the death penalty can inflict additional harm on them by keeping them embroiled in the legal process for years or decades.

There are compelling reasons for conservatives and Republicans to be concerned about the death penalty. Our individual motivations for speaking out on this issue may differ, but we agree on one thing: the death penalty today is a broken and ineffective government program. The time has come for Nebraska to address these problems by repealing the death penalty.

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