

Life sentence is a better remedy

Approximately six years ago, representatives of the South Dakota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America directed then-Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl to ask the state not to carry out the death penalty against Elijah Page and other condemned inmates. Page was eventually executed in July 2007.

The resolution states DeGroot-Nesdahl should "communicate to appropriate state officials the concern of this assembly regarding impending executions and ask that the state of South Dakota refrain from imposing the death penalty on Elijah Page or on others in South Dakota who are awaiting execution."

The resolution was passed in 2006 at the annual Synod Assembly at Augustana College with "a clear majority," the bishop said.

Approximately a year later, Page was executed. Last Monday, 50-year-old Eric Robert was executed at the state penitentiary in Sioux Falls. Robert killed a prison guard during a failed escape attempt.

Six years ago, we agreed with the stand taken by the South Dakota Synod of the ELCA, and our views haven't wavered since.

We believe it is time for South Dakota to follow the lead taken by our neighbors in North Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota. It is time for South Dakota to abolish the death penalty.

We say this knowing there are plenty of people with opposing views, who support capital punishment as a justified sentence to hand down to someone who commits a heinous crime.

So why have the death penalty? Proponents will point out that, well, people want it. And they'll produce polls that show that the public overwhelmingly supports putting people convicted of certain serious deadly crimes to death.

What's never talked about is the true cost of capital punishment in the United States.

A New Jersey Policy Perspectives report concluded that the state's death penalty has cost taxpayers \$253 million since 1983, a figure that is over and above the costs that would have been incurred had the state utilized a sentence of life without parole instead of death. The study examined the costs of death penalty cases to prosecutor offices, public defender offices, courts, and correctional facilities.

A report released by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury recommended changes to the state's death penalty and called into question its effectiveness in preventing crime.

In its review of death penalty expenses, the state of Kansas concluded that capital cases are 70 percent more expensive than comparable non-death penalty cases. The study counted death penalty case costs through to execution and found that the median death penalty case costs \$1.26 million. Non-death penalty cases were counted through to the end of

incarceration and were found to have a median cost of \$740,000.

Capital cases burden county budgets with large unexpected costs, according to a report released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, "The Budgetary Repercussions of Capital Convictions," by Katherine Baicker. Counties manage these high costs by decreasing funding for highways and police and by increasing taxes. The report estimates that between 1982-1997

BETWEEN THE LINES



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the extra cost of capital trials was \$1.6 billion.

The most comprehensive death penalty study in the country found that the death penalty costs North Carolina \$2.16 million more per execution than a non-death penalty murder case with a sentence of life imprisonment (Duke University, May 1993). On a national basis, these figures translate to an extra cost of over \$1 billion spent since 1976 on the death penalty.

Notice a trend here? Because of the delays, the inconsistency, the drain on the public purse and the nightmarish possibility of executing an innocent person, it is time for the United States to end the practice.

And, if the country won't end it, we can at least abolish it here in South Dakota, where we're lucky if we can scrape together enough money each year to adequately fund education, or provide needed health care services for our elderly. We must be prepared to do all we can to offer economic incentives to attract new businesses, and tap into wind and bio-energy.

We can do all of this and still maintain a clear sense of justice in South Dakota without the death penalty.

Society's worst offenders merit no sympathy. They'll get none here. If you're the victim of a crime, especially a murder that's ripped a jagged hole in your life where a loved one used to be, you have a right to be outraged and emotional. You're entitled to think of fundamental safeguards like due process and a presumption of innocence as annoyances.

It's not the victim's responsibility to be calm and dispassionate, but it is the law's. Courts must deal firmly and decisively with murderers, but that isn't happening under a scheme that deals out death penalties with whimsical unpredictability and makes victims wait years, even decades, for resolution.

Life in prison without parole is a better solution than a death sentence.

The Vermillion Plain Talk editorials reflect the opinion of Plain Talk editor David Lias. You may contact him at david.lias@plaintalk.net

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Mr. Potato Head goes under the knife

When I caught wind that potatoes were undergoing a makeover to be healthier and more appealing, my ears perked up. You see, I love potatoes, and they love me right back by adding extra padding, if you know what I mean.

There may be brighter days ahead for all of us potato lovers, since geneticists and the U.S. Potato Board are in cahoots to give our good old brown and white russet a new look.

Why? Money, of course. For several decades now, taters have been getting a bad rap, mainly because of the carbs and they're frequently misunderstood as not being healthy.

Claiming otherwise, this contemporary band of tater altering scientists is working to dispel that myth by giving the veggie a whole new look.

This all came about after geneticists examined the makeup of yellow, blue and red potatoes in Peru, known as the original home of potatoes.

Scientists determined the pigments in South American tubers are really disease-fighting antioxidants that are good for us.

With the same pigments as blueberries and cranberries, affordable, accessible potatoes would be more economical. Besides, most people like potatoes anyway.

With growers hopping on the spud reinvention bandwagon, purple ones (think beets) are now popping up at farmers' markets here and there around the U.S.

Other varieties, like red-fleshed and red-skinned, pink, black, multicolored and striped currently are being developed.

Not only are potatoes changing their stripes, they're changing shape, too. Fingerling taters, a sleek, elegant variety, make potatoes trendy for the first time since French fries hit

the food scene.

With a whole new breed of colors, tastes and even textures in their arsenal, the potato brigade is working on spanking new products to convince the American public to consume more.

In reality, when spuds aren't fried or packed with sour cream, they are very low in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium and a good source of Vitamin B6, potassium, manganese and Vitamin C.

And at the rate they're going, grocery store potato offerings of the future will look more like today's apple and gourd sections with many varieties to choose from.

Although, if we end up falling in love with this new-age tater, we'll be late adopters. Great Britain, where exotic and tasty types are a hot menu item, has at least a decade over the U.S.

With all the hoopla over genetically altering this stalwart mainstay of our ancestors, I started thinking of other vegetables that could use a boost.

Take Brussels sprouts, please. With an appearance and a construction of cabbage, their leafy green makeup is supposed to be really good for us. But unless you drown them in butter, the bitter taste will kill you. Believe me, even if you gourmet-up that darn veggie, no matter how much roasting or sautéing, Brussels sprouts leave a lot to be desired.

So why not make them taste like beef gravy, pot roast or even ice cream.

Next is broccoli. That poor gangly side dish can't survive the menu without first baking it in eggs and cheese, smothering it in Hollandaise sauce or making broccoli cheese soup. Why not re-engineer it to taste like grilled burgers?

To support my proposals for unpopular veggies, take a look at what has happened to iceberg lettuce. Once upon a time, it was the only kind of supermarket greens we had to choose from. Today, all those homely heads bow in the shadows of leaf lettuce, Romaine, spinach, Swiss chard, endive and bags of salad mixes as the preferred fixings. With an already built in crunch, mess some with the gene code and make lettuce taste more like potato chips, and then see what happens. Well, maybe that's way over the top with too many potatoes.

For eons, mothers everywhere have used bribery and trickery to get their kids to eat their vegetables. Not a whole lot has changed. It's just that today the big wigs of business and science are backing Mom and taking it a step further by manipulating the nature of veggies into something that will be quite unrecognizable to most of us.

What's next? Pink, black and white peas that taste like Good 'N Plenty candy? Now, there's an idea!

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A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her writing has won first-place in competitions of the National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women. In the 2009, 2010 and 2011 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contests, her columns have earned eight first-place awards. To contact Paula, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com, follow her blog at my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

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SOUTH DAKOTA EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls: Oct. 8, 2012 University dropout rate hurts state

College recruitment is a tough job in South Dakota these days.

Besides getting kids to sign up for classes and choose a dorm, now the focus includes retention more than ever. State universities are working to bring freshmen back as sophomores, and in the early stages of the efforts, they're losing ground, slightly.

The state's six public universities have focused on helping students feel that they belong on campus and can get academic or social help when they need it. The universities have new software to earlier identify at-risk students, require seminar courses to help freshmen get acquainted with campus and have overhauled the way they help struggling students with math courses. It's all part of the retention effort, which leads to a higher graduation rate.

So far, the average number of freshman students who return as sophomores is 72 percent, the same as last year. The system overall, which accounts for students who transfer to other regental universities is 75 percent, dropping a percentage point from a year earlier. Results are mixed among the schools, as well. For example, Black Hills

State University made improvements from 59 percent last year to 65 percent this year. The University of South Dakota, on the other hand, saw its rates fall from 78 percent last year to 75 percent this year.

We don't have an easy solution to help solve the problem but applaud the Board of Regents for looking seriously at the reasons behind the state's dropout rate. The regents think retention is so important that they are considering awarding schools bonuses for doing well. Student success not only helps the six schools but also provides a well-educated and trained people for the state's work force.

We would like to see the regents continue to lead to turn the problems around and bring all of the state's public universities into an era of retention success. The state needs to continue to aggressively pursue reasons behind the dropout numbers and look at multiple solutions to help students stay in college in order to be prepared for professions that can raise their standard of living and quality of life.

That's important on an individual level and for the entire state.

Watertown Public Opinion: Oct. 11, 2012

Part of the process
South Dakota is getting ready

for two executions in the coming weeks. Barring last-minute legal twists involving inmates Eric Robert and Donald Moeller, both of whom have said they're ready to die, South Dakota will carry out the final steps in its death penalty process for the first time since 2007 when Elijah Page was executed for his role in the torture and killing of a 19-year-old man seven years prior. He, too, asked to die. That execution was the first in the state in 60 years.

This month Robert and Moeller are scheduled to meet a similar fate; Robert for killing a prison guard during a failed prison break and Moeller for kidnapping, raping and murdering a 9-year-old girl. Robert is scheduled to die sometime next week and Moeller two or three weeks later.

There are no concerns in either case about the possibility of executing an innocent man, which may have happened in other states around the country. Both men have admitted their guilt, both have said the penalty is just and both are ready to die. And a lot of people believe they should die for the crimes they committed. It's tough to argue with their reasons for thinking that way and yet there is still something about the process that bothers a lot of people.

Perhaps it's the clinical nature of the execution process. Walking someone down a hall to an

enclosed room; laying them down on a gurney and strapping them to it, and inserting the needle — or needles — into the condemned man's arm to administer a lethal dose of a controlled substance. Outside the room are witnesses selected to watch the execution. They are there for a variety of reasons; either to cover the story for the media, to see justice done for the victim's family or to make sure the proper rules and protocols are followed. It's a precise process and something Robert and Moeller both want to happen.

And yet many of us wonder, both supporters and opponents of the death penalty. The guilty are gone and so are the victims yet the grief the crimes caused still lingers. Nothing will ever bring the dead back or completely eliminate the grief. Those are absolutes that cannot be changed.

But many people wonder if events like South Dakota will experience in the next few weeks will have an impact other than on those involved. Will anything really change? Will crimes like these become obsolete? Will the deaths of these two deter others from committing similar crimes? In the end we may not get whatever answers we are seeking but the questions raised are worth thinking about. Like everything else in the death penalty, it's all part of the process.

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