

MURDER IN MARYLAND: MURDER RATE SKYROCKETS, LIBERAL LEGISLATURE STRIKES "COMPROMISE."

DEATH PENALTY REPEAL PROPONENTS ARE AT IT AGAIN!

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PINE BLUFFS – In Maryland, death penalty opponents are at it again! Democrat Governor Martin O'Malley's desire to repeal the death penalty statute, re-enacted in Maryland in 1978, has everything to do with placating his liberal Democrat base, and nothing to do with looking after the welfare of the citizens of his state.

To conclude that repeal is the way to go, Mr. O'Malley must ignore statistics, both national and state, that clearly demonstrate the positive effects of capital punishment on murder rates.

Proponents of repeal argue that Maryland's death penalty law has not resulted in any reduction in the total number of murders in that state, and as such it is neither a deterrence nor an act of retribution. In Maryland, that argument is correct as far as it goes, but before examining the reasons it is lacking, let's take a look at these figures for the years 2004 through 2007:

Number of Murders in Maryland (Death Penalty Law on Books, but not enforced):

2004	521
2005	522
2006	546
2007	553

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, Maryland's murder *rate* in 2006 was 9.7 per 100,000 people. In 2007 it was 9.8 murders per 100,000. Comparing this with the states of Texas and Virginia, where prosecutors seek the death penalty frequently, the contrast is stark:

Murder Rate in Texas, Virginia and Maryland per 100,000 people:

Texas:	2006	5.9	2007	5.9
Virginia:	2006	5.2	2007	5.3
Maryland:	2006	9.7	2007	9.8

Even as Maryland and a few other states debate whether or not to stop executing criminals, Texas, the national leader in executions for many years, has picked up its pace in the first two and a half months of 2009, marking its 11th and 12th executions during the second week of March. It is on a pace to eclipse its 2008 number (18), which was a lower than average figure due to the freeze placed on executions nationally by the Supreme Court, as it studied whether or not the lethal injection method might be unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment.

People in states like Wyoming, where almost everyone owns several guns and knows how to use them, but which has few murders each year, do not understand why any state would not enact a death penalty law, and once on the books, would not use it. They are dismayed when they read about this type of travesty being foisted on the people of another state, effectively giving criminals a "license to kill." Here are Wyoming's statistics for the same period as the comparison above:

Wyoming: (Death Penalty Law on Books, AND Enforced):

2004	11
2005	14
2006	9
2007	16

Why has Maryland not seen a reduction in this type of crime? Simply because, even though the death penalty statute has been on the books since 1978, it has not been used much – not sought or applied by prosecutors, who cite numerous reasons for not doing so, including the expense of prosecuting a murder case. What they leave unstated is that Maryland is effectively a one-party state, where the Democrats control the Legislature and most city and county governments. That means the vast majority of prosecutors in Maryland are liberal Democrats, who own a philosophical bias against the death penalty. That bias long ago surfaced as a racial argument – that blacks are disproportionately executed in Maryland – even though statistics show that 40% of whites were executed in a recent year, even though they did not account for 40% of the murders committed.

Mr. O'Malley is cut from the same cloth. Since moving into the Governor's office in Annapolis, he has frequently stated his desire to eliminate the Death Penalty. A bill to do just that was introduced in the Legislature this session. But perhaps there's hope. On March 4, 2008, the Senate announced a "compromise" on a death penalty repeal bill by amending the existing bill [rather than killing it – no pun intended] to further restrict capital prosecutions – exactly the wrong way to wrong way to go in a state where gangs of thugs in Baltimore, for example, terrorize its large black population with a murder almost daily. The proposed revision to the law would preclude murder cases where the only evidence is eyewitness testimony (which they deem unreliable), and in turn, require DNA evidence, videotaped evidence, or a voluntary, videotaped confession.

Again, advocates of this change cite the findings of a "bi-partisan commission" appointed by the Governor in March 2008 but denounced by Republicans as a "stacked deck," with proponents of Governor O'Malley's repeal position occupying 12 of the 19 Commission seats. At the time, a Republican Delegate was quoted as saying, "The outcome will be that the death penalty is racially biased, that it's cruel and unusual punishment, and that it's more costly to use the death penalty than life in prison." Others labeled it as "a decision waiting for a process to validate it."

The Commission "carefully studied" the state's death penalty and, as predicted, recommended abolishing it. But most students of the political scene understand that the appointment of a commission to "study a problem and recommend a solution" is a tactic resorted to frequently by governors when they recognize a controversial issue and do

not want to take responsibility for any change. That way, they cannot be blamed if a commission which they appointed returns with an unworkable solution, or one that proves unpopular with the voters.

The astronomic number of murders annually in the state of Maryland is disturbing, and is one of the reasons my wife and I moved from there four years ago. It is something that should no longer be tolerated by the citizens of "the line state." However, as long as the voters continue to support and elect Democrats to public office, this and other wrong-headed policies will continue, and more innocent people will die at the hands of merciless killers.

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