



The Arkansas Execution Spree

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Governor Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas has an anti-abortion record. He is also overseeing a series of 8 executions; one on Thursday, April 20, and a double execution yesterday evening, Monday, April 24. We perceive a gaping contradiction in these two facts.

This opinion isn't limited to those of us who follow the consistent life ethic, which opposes abortion and executions (as well as war) for the same reasons. There have been a good number of pro-lifers, including conservative Republicans, who have understood that pro-life reasoning on abortion is connected to pro-life reasoning on the death penalty.

For example, Richard Viguerie said, "Those of us who oppose abortion believe that it is perhaps the greatest immorality to take an innocent life. While the death penalty is supposed to take the life of the guilty, we know that is not always the case . . . But even when guilt is certain, there are many downsides to the death penalty system." Governor Brownback of Kansas said, "If we're trying to establish a culture of life, it's difficult to have the state sponsoring executions."

For several such quotations, see <http://www.prolifequakers.org/index.php/deathpenalty>

In addition, bunching up so many executions at one time can be traumatic to the staff ordered to carry them out. Posttrauma symptoms (symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD) have been found in people in a wide range of killing practices, including combat veterans, abortion providers, and executioners. The more traumas there are, the harder the emotional impact.

This concern has been raised in the media [in this case specifically](#), since 8 so close will be emotionally harder – and more likely to lead to mistakes – than one at a time. See "Arkansas' hurried execution plan sparks concern for prison staff," by Jon Herskovitz of Reuters on April 5, 2017, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-arkansas-execution-idUSKBN1772GU>

An example of how this trauma feels is given by Larry Myers in testimony about his conversation with a man who had participated in an execution: “He said that he was physically sick two days afterwards, he was vomiting and had fits of depression. He said he had nightmares for years after, and that the gruesome images still haunted him, even 12 years later!”

Or this in a radio interview with Fred Allen, three years after the executions: “I don't know if it's a mental breakdown, I don't know if—it will probably be classified more as a traumatic stress, similar to what the individuals in war had, you know, and they'd come back from the war and it might be three months, it might be two years, it might be five years, all of a sudden they relive it again, and all that has to come out.”

For more personal stories on how the act of killing traumatizes people, three of which involve executions, see <http://www.rachelmacnair.com/pits-stories.html>. For a basic explanation of “Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress,” see <http://www.rachelmacnair.com/pits>.

Sources:

Viguerie: “When Governments Kill,” Sojourners, 2009, at <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2009/when-governments-kill>.

Brownback: “*U.S. News and World Report*, April 11, 2005. p. 34)

Meyers: page 35-36, testimony of Larry Myers on June 28, 1991, before the State of Nebraska Pardons Board (Governor Ben Nelson, Secretary of State Allen Beerman and Attorney General Don Stenberg). It concerns the Application of Harold Otey to commute his death sentence to a sentence of life imprisonment without parole.

Allen: “Witness to the Execution”, *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, October 12, 2000).

Consistent Life Network Mission Statement

We are committed to the protection of life, which is threatened in today's world by war, abortion, poverty, racism, the death penalty and euthanasia. We believe that these issues are linked under a 'consistent ethic of life'. We challenge those working on all or some of these issues to maintain a cooperative spirit of peace, reconciliation, and respect in protecting the unprotected.

Purpose

Consistent Life is a network uniting many organizations and individuals who support the consistent ethic of reverence of life, as expressed in our Mission Statement.

We serve the anti-violence community by connecting issues, building bridges, and strengthening the case against each kind of socially-approved killing by consistently opposing them all.