

Family Questions Why Execution Took 17 Years

BY NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS AND SHANNON DININNY
Associated Press Writers

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Nearly two decades after Holly Washa was raped, tortured and murdered by an Oregon convict who had skipped out on his parole, her family is satisfied that the killer has been put to death, but they question why it took so long.

Cal Coburn Brown, 52, spent nearly 17 years on death row before he was executed early Friday by lethal injection for killing Washa in 1991.

As the state's first execution since 2001, Brown's death served as a reminder that Washington remains an active capital punishment state. The use of a new single-drug method went smoothly, likely clearing the way for more executions soon. Seven men sit on Washington's death row, and several murder defendants face death-penalty prosecutions in coming months.

"It's been so long we had to deal with all of this," said Becky Washa, the victim's sister, of Sioux Falls, S.D. "Now it's finally over. I don't have to think about him any more."

John Washa, the victim's father, recalled the killing spree of Charles Starkweather, who killed 11 people in Nebraska and Wyoming during a two-month period in 1957-58. He was executed five months after his capture in 1959.

"He didn't last very long," said John Washa, of Ogallala, Neb. "We should have something changed so it doesn't go out this long."

King County prosecutor Dan Satterberg, who witnessed the execution with the family, said Brown's death was quick, painless and heavily litigated.

"And it stands in stark contrast to the death he handed Holly Washa," he said. "By any measure, 17 years of appeals is too much."

Last year, The Washa family made the long drive from Nebraska to Walla Walla, but Brown received a stay of execution just eight hours before he was to die. His lawyers filed a number of appeals in recent weeks, including one to the U.S. Supreme Court just a few hours before his death, but no stay came this time.

Instead, Brown was pronounced dead at 12:56 a.m., after a four-member team sent a dose of sodium thiopental through the plastic tubes leading into Washington State Penitentiary's execution chamber.

In a lengthy statement, Brown did not apologize to Washa's family but said he understood their enmity for him. He said he forgave that hatred and hoped the execution would give them closure. He also said the prison staff had been most professional and that he had no complaints about his treatment there.

However, Brown protested sentencing disparities, saying criminals who had killed many more people, such as Green River killer Gary Ridgway, were serving life sentences while he was put to death.

"I only killed one victim," Brown said. "I cannot really see that there is true justice. Hopefully, sometime in the future that gets straightened out."

Brown had argued in his appeals that his mental illness was not adequately considered during his sentencing and that it should bar his execution. According to court records, he suffered from bipolar disorder.

After his comments, Brown, who was lying on his back strapped to a gurney, looked up at the tubes sticking out of the wall and connected to his body. When the drug was administered, his chest heaved three times and his lips shuddered, then there was no movement. The new one-drug method replaced a three-drug cocktail for lethal injections that had been the focus of appeals by other death row inmates. Washington is the second state in the nation, after Ohio, to adopt the new method.

The execution went as planned and without undue pain, said Belinda Stewart, communications and outreach director for the state Department of Corrections.

"The execution was quick, dignified and humane, as it should be," she said.

Brown's attorney and members of his family were not present, though he spoke with them by phone Thursday. His attorney did not return a message seeking comment Friday.

Nebraska Study Seeks To Close Boat Dealer Loophole

BY MARGERY A. BECK
Associated Press Writer

LINCOLN, Neb. — A legislative study is calling for state lawmakers to close a loophole that allows anyone to claim to be a boat dealer — allowing them to avoid paying sales taxes on boats they buy.

State Sen. Dave Pankonin of Louisville presented the study Friday to the Legislature's Transportation and Telecommunications Committee.

The matter came to light last year when it was discovered state Sen. Kent Rogert of Tekamah had listed himself as a boat dealer, thus avoiding more than \$2,000 in sales tax on his 28-foot, 310-horsepower speedboat, estimated to be worth about \$40,000.

Rogert had said he occasionally buys and sells boats and that the speedboat — which he had had since 2003 — was for sale.

Rogert did not attend Friday's hearing and could not be reached for comment. It is not known whether he still owns the speedboat.

Boat dealers in Nebraska aren't required to pay sales tax on boats they buy, but anyone who buys a boat for his own use does. Dealers also are not licensed or regulated in Nebraska, according to the State Department of Motor Vehicles. That means people can simply declare themselves boat dealers when they register a boat.

While questions of Rogert's boat dealer status brought the issue to the forefront, Pankonin told the committee Friday he had sought the study at the request of boat dealers in his district who said

they have trouble buying and selling boats at out-of-state boat shows and auctions because they can't produce a Nebraska boat dealer's license.

"I think this issue is one where we know we have problems," Pankonin said before the committee.

Jack Gould with Common Cause Nebraska, a government watchdog group, told the committee that his group went to three different state agencies and filed an open records request to find out how many residents have listed themselves with the state as boat dealers. The group found about 150 people in the state claiming to be boat dealers and believe as many as half of those are not legitimate dealers.

Creating a new licensing procedure for boat dealers would be easy and inexpensive, William Jackson, director of the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicle's Industry Licensing Board, said Friday at the hearing.

"I'd be happy to help put that together," Jackson told the committee. "Our industry can handle the licensing issue."

Jackson said licensing boat dealers would be as simple as following the guidelines for licensing dealers of cars and motorcycles. Those dealers must do things like show they're bonded and insured and have a brick-and-mortar building from which they're selling that's open 40 hours a week. They must also pay an annual fee, he said.

The study could prompt the committee or a state lawmaker to introduce a measure during next year's session to create new state oversight of boat dealers.

Rabid Bat Found In West Omaha Home

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Members of a west Omaha family have been advised to seek preventive medical treatment because a rabid bat was found in their home.

The Douglas County Health Department says the bat and another were found last week. None of the residents reported

being bitten, but officials say the residents could have been exposed in other ways.

The Nebraska Humane Society says it's received dozens of calls about bats in the past few weeks. Vice president Mark Langan says that if people find bats in their homes, they should call the Humane Society. And he

says that if the people are bitten, they should call their doctors.

The state Department of Health and Human Services says that as of Sept. 9, 44 cases of rabies had been reported in Nebraska.

USDA Lowers Prediction For 2010 Nebraska Corn Crop

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — An even bigger bin-busting crop of soybeans is expected this fall, according to a federal report released Friday, but forecasters trimmed their predictions for Nebraska corn farmers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture report said Nebraska farmers were expected to bring in 1.53 billion bushels of corn, based on Sept. 1 conditions. That's 1 percent under the USDA's Aug. 1 prediction and 3 percent below last year.

A record corn yield of 179 bushels an acre was still forecast, but that's a bushel under the Aug. 1 figure. Acres to be harvested for grain was down 3 percent from Sept. 1, 2009.

For soybeans, the USDA raised its estimate for a record Nebraska crop to 294 million bushels, compared with the 284 million bushels

in the Aug. 1 forecast.

Yield was forecast at 55 bushels an acre, which is a half bushel higher than the record set last year. Harvest acreage was up 12 percent from a year ago.

The sorghum forecast was unchanged from August at 6.1 million bushels, which is down 53 percent from last year. The expected yield: 94 bushels an acre, down a bushel from 2009.

The USDA said Nebraska farmers were expected to harvest 65,000 acres of sorghum, which is less than half the 2009 acreage.

For sugar beets, the USDA trimmed its forecast to 1.05 million tons. That's 6 percent less than the Aug. 1 forecast and 19 percent under last year. The yield was forecast at 22 tons an acre, down 2.6 tons from 2009.

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