



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101

Column for Week of:
June 18, 2007

Contact: Todd Scott
(573) 751-1464 / (888) 711-9278

A Fitting Punishment

There are some crimes so heinous that only a penalty of death will fit as punishment. Case in point, on the morning of March 22, 1989, Michael Taylor saw 15-year-old Ann Harrison of Kansas City waiting for the school bus at the end of her home's driveway. Originally telling his partner in crime, Roderick Nunley, that he just wanted to steal the girl's purse, Taylor ended up kidnapping Harrison, raping her, and finally, stabbing her and leaving her to die... bleeding to death, alone, locked in the trunk of a car. The depravity of his crime was so apparent a jury of his peers convicted him and sentenced him to die.

For more than a dozen years, Taylor's appeals went through the courts. After all his arguments were heard, Taylor was finally scheduled to die in Missouri's death chamber on February 2, 2006... nearly 17 years to the day of his cruel murder of Ann Harrison. But within just hours of the appointed execution time, a judge stepped in and stopped it, siding with Taylor's lawyers that it could be cruel and unusual. Cruel and unusual, I believe, is more accurately applied to how Ann Harrison's family has been treated, waiting for years to see her killer brought to justice... only to see him get another grasp at life – a second chance Harrison never got.

After a year and a half of more wrangling in the courts, a federal panel of judges decided this month that yes, indeed, Missouri's method of execution does not subject the condemned to an unreasonable amount of pain. Michael Taylor should now face the penalty for what he has done – in a much more humane method than what he used to kill Ann Harrison in cold blood. The courts have found what the vast majority of people in Missouri have known for a long time: that lethal injection is a reasonable method of execution that passes every constitutional test set before it.

We know that no execution method would satisfy the social activist groups that just plain oppose the death penalty no matter how it is carried out. But for more than 20 years, lethal injection has been an accepted method of handing out the ultimate punishment for the ultimate crimes. It's time we took our system of justice out of the hands of activist judges and liberal groups that only portend to seek a more humane method.

This year in the legislature under [House Bill 820](#), we were also able to protect our Department of Corrections employees from being exposed to threats and retaliation for doing their jobs by keeping confidential the names of those workers who assist in executions. Those who choose to "out" these brave folks in their unenviable task will face civil litigation. And any licensing board

or department won't be allowed to sanction a professional license of an execution team member who is carrying out his or her lawful duty.

The death penalty won't bring back Ann Harrison. It won't heal the wounds from the tremendous feeling of loss her family must feel having lost her at such a young age... with her whole life, filled with such potential and promise, ahead of her. But it will bring a sense of justice, a sense of integrity, and a sense of dignity to our death penalty that it is a fitting punishment for the most horrendous of crimes.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.