

Feb. 10, 2009, VA Delegate Harvey Morgan (R – 98th district) testified against expanding the death penalty:

"In 1979, during my first campaign for HOD [House of Delegates], I knew I'd be expected to state my position on the death penalty. Uncertain at that time, I discussed the issue with persons whose opinions I respected: my mother, our minister, a Catholic woman of great judgment and intelligence, and one of my best friends, who is my attorney, active in my church and a mentor. It was he who helped most in formulating a position. Capital punishment is recognized in scripture as fitting in some situations. My friends suggested that when a crime is so heinous, society would be better served if the perpetrator was removed, then the death penalty may be appropriate. Further, he suggested that to genuinely believe it appropriate one should be willing to "pull the switch." For years, in spite of questioning my own willingness to actually be the executioner, I have suggested several death penalty measures. But with the emergence of DNA evidence and the sure knowledge that innocent persons have been executed - some even with eyewitness testimony, later disproved by DNA testing, I'm not so sure anymore. Also, remembering Jesus' statement to the crowd about to stone the woman caught in adultery (John 8:7) - "He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her." Not that any of us has actually committed murder, but Jesus also said that we're guilty just thinking of it. I'm reminded of a statement attributed to Clarence Darrow, the noted criminal attorney made famous by the Scopes Trial, "I've never really wished ill of anyone, but there have been times that I have read the obituaries with reasonable satisfaction."

But, back to capital punishment. If one truly believes in the sanctity of life, does that include not just the unborn that usually is the subject of the issue, but all life? Is it then appropriate to "snuff out" the life of another human - like stepping on a spider? We, Virginians like to think of ourselves as conservative. Conservative can be defined as resisting change or innovation or moderate, prudent, and cautious, but when we execute more people than any other state, (except perhaps Texas) is that conservative or reactionary?. One can argue the cost to the state of life imprisonment without parole. In response, I would suggest that it may be a wash when considering the cost of "endless" appeals after the death penalty has been pronounced. Further, which is the worst punishment, to have one's life snuffed out quickly and perhaps painlessly, or to

spend a lifetime behind bars, forced to live with and remember the crime? Many lifers have turned their lives around and, even in prison; have become a force for good in the lives of others. I do understand why those among us would seek "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" - that's Biblical too (Exodus 21:24) - but as the years have passed for me and I've become more thoughtful about these issues, rather than expand the list of capital crimes, it really would be the conservative position to reduce it with time and, upon further examination, perhaps eliminate capital punishment as several states have already done."