
National News

New Jersey First State To Abolish Death Penalty

With a vote Dec. 13 in the state Assembly, New Jersey became the first state to abolish the death penalty since it was reinstated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976. Members of the lower house voted 44-36 to replace the death sentence with life in prison without parole. The state Senate approved the bill on Dec. 10, and Gov. Jon S. Corzine, a Democrat, has said he will sign it within a week.

A state commission found in January that the death penalty hasn't deterred murder, risks killing an innocent person, and is a more expensive sentence than life in prison.

Lyndon LaRouche has long argued that the death penalty is nothing more than "human sacrifice," which undermines respect for life.

The bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Wilfredo Caraballo (D-Newark), said during a floor debate: "I have absolutely no doubt that other states will follow our lead. In the end, this is a matter of conscience." The measure will spare eight men on the state's death row.

Although New Jersey reinstated the death penalty in 1982, no one has been executed in the Garden State since 1963.

Bills to abolish the death penalty, which is still on the books in 37 states, were recently approved by a Colorado House committee, the Montana Senate, and the New Mexico House. But none of those bills has advanced.

LaRouche HBPA Wins 'Round One' at NBCSL

The Housing Committee of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) voted up the LaRouche resolution for a Homeowners and Bank Protection Act, after a spirited debate at the organization's annual conference in Little Rock, Ark. The full assembly is scheduled to vote on the resolution on Dec. 14.

The leadership of the NBCSL had tried

to hijack the LaRouche resolution with a weak substitute, directed only toward predatory lenders. After a panel discussion before the committee, which included representatives from Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, the Department of Justice, and the Mortgage Bankers, all hell broke loose.

Missouri State Rep. Juanita Walton, who had introduced the HBPA legislation to the NBCSL months ago, spoke out, along with others, saying that they were not going to go along with Bush-Cheney any longer. LaRouche PAC's Stuart Rosenblatt noted that the LaRouche resolution was modeled on the legislation of Franklin Roosevelt, saying that 25 HBPA resolutions had been filed in 12 states. A state senator from New Jersey reported that his son had put the resolution before the Newark City Council, where it passed.

When the vote came, both Representative Walton and Pennsylvania State Rep. Harold James gave passionate speeches in the resolution's defense. When a discussion arose on what the cost would be, Walton replied, "What's the cost of *not* doing it?!" James followed with, "I don't care what the cost is; we have to keep people in their homes."

Another state representative urged people to "act now, we are running out of time. . . . We need a resolution of substance, not a financial statement."

When the vote came up before the Housing committee, all voted in support, with one abstention.

Grossman: 'Video-Game Killers Are Jackals'

Lt. Col. David Grossman (ret.) sent the following comments to *EIR*, in response to Helga Zepp-LaRouche's Dec. 8 statement: "Ban Killer Video Games and Internet Violence!" (*EIR*, Dec. 14, 2007).

"The one thing all these killers have in common is that they are all trained on video games. None of them were in martial arts, paintball, or sports. They are 'death incarnate' until faced with a real threat of physical violence, and then their 'training' fails them

and their 'survival brain' says, 'Danger! Danger! This is not a game any more!' And then they kill themselves (reboot the game?), or curl up in a ball and weep.

"This is the end result of the video game generation. They are not 'wolves' . . . they are 'jackals.'

"The kids who gave us Jonesboro in the middle school and Columbine in the high school are now giving us Va. Tech, Omaha Mall, and Colorado Church massacres . . . and it's going to get a lot worse. And it all comes back to the dominant influence in their lives: thousands of hours playing video game 'murder simulators.' . . ."

Veterans Suicides: Why the Cover-Up?

A dramatic hearing by the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Dec. 12 brought out into the open the fact that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has the resources to collect sufficient data on veterans' mental health issues, including suicides, but is not doing so. The hearing was informed by a CBS News report last month, that 6,256 veterans had committed suicide in 2005 alone, a stunning rate of 120 per week, with the highest rate of suicide being among veterans in the 20- to 24-year age group. The VA responded by attacking the way CBS compiled its figures, instead of responding to the obvious epidemic that CBS exposed. That kind of response continued during the House hearing.

Prior to top health officials of the VA testifying, the committee heard three hours of testimony from family members of soldiers who had committed suicide, and two authors on the subject of mental illness and war veterans. What came out of their testimony is that the VA and the Defense Department don't do enough to screen and track what happens to combat veterans after they return home, especially if they're in the National Guard or the Reserves, nor to track and treat mental illness. "This is a public health issue of monstrous proportions," declared one witness, and yet there is "surprise and denial" from official sources about the problem.