

Fix the death penalty bill

The Oregon Legislature recently approved a bill to narrow the aggravated murder law thereby reducing the number of people eligible for the death penalty. Its sponsors told everyone that it would not be retroactive and would apply only to future crimes. That was important to ensure victims of past crimes and their families would not be traumatized by relitigating old cases. Many lawmakers who historically have stood up for victims' rights voted for the bill based on that promise. Now it turns out that the bill is retroactive after all.

The courts and Oregon's Solicitor General have decided that the law does apply to old cases. This creates uncertainty not only for victims, but also for my office and all Oregon prosecutors. I am morally opposed to the government killing people who commit crimes; other Oregonians support an eye-for-an-eye system of justice. Regardless of where we stand on the death penalty, I trust we all want truth in legislating. The death penalty bill fails in this regard, and Gov. Kate Brown should call a special session of the Legislature to fix it.

Brown and legislators now must decide whether the assurances made on the floor of Oregon's Capitol mean something. When votes are cast based on mistaken beliefs, will they right the wrong?

The harm of this bill is certain, and the fix is simple. A bill to remove the retroactivity snafu can be debated and voted on in a one-day special session.

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