

Senator Dan Harrington

**SB 306**

Closing Statement

We have heard a range of arguments – both for and against – and I thank my colleagues for their thoughtful discussion on arguably the most important matter they will face this – or any – session, that of life and death.

As I said at the beginning of this discussion, I believe you can vote to **retain** the death penalty only if you are **absolutely sure** of its justice, of its fairness, of its equity, of its fiscal responsibility, and of its morality in today's society. But not only does it fail on **all** of these accounts, it is administered by imperfect humans. I would submit, Mr. President, that no one – **no one** – is infallible. No one can be absolutely sure that the system is 100% perfect. And should we demand **anything less** when we are talking about life and death?

If you want a system that is fair,

If you want a system that is just,

If you want a system that is **not** antiquated nor cruel nor unusual,

If you want a system that is **not** fickle regarding matters of life and death,

If you want a system with equitable sentencing,

If you would join our neighbor North Dakota which abolished the death penalty in 1973 and which routinely enjoys lower homicide rates per capita than Montana,

If you would have our state join with **every other** Western industrialized nation in abolishing the death penalty,

If you want to show true political leadership and embrace Montana's maturing standards of decency,

If you want a system that values life and does not perpetuate murder as an example to our children and their children and the generations of Montanans to come,

If you want swift closure for victims' families with a system that allows victims' families to start down the path of healing immediately instead of waiting 10 – 20 years,

If you want a system that does not create new victims as it kills old perpetrators,

If you want a system that does not assist prisoners in committing suicide when they choose to die,

If you want a system that prevents the possibility of criminals from dominating the media spotlight over and over and over,

If you want a system that is itself a severe and appropriate punishment – a system that demands and condemns perpetrators to the **daily and lifelong** realization that society has judged them unfit to enter its ranks *ever* again,

If you want a system which leaves the ultimate decisions of life and death to the Maker alone, that **He** decides when their time is finished and how long a sentence they shall **truly** serve,

If you want a system that does not waste public resources – arguably in the millions of dollars per case where the death penalty is sought – while only managing to execute 3 individuals over the last 30 years,

If you want a system that does **not** put Montana's government in the business of dealing out unnecessary death,

If you find yourself unsure in these, the weightiest matters you will consider on this floor and if you want to err on the side of life rather than death,

And finally, if you want a system that does not ask other people to kill in your name and my name and all of our names,

Then I ask that you vote that this bill *DO* pass.

Mr. President.