

# Death Penalty 'choice' unfair to minorities

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by Tom Harris

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We, as Alaskan Citizens, are being asked, by Sen. Robin Taylor in Senate Bill 52, to choose death, as in the "Death Penalty", as an "acceptable" alternative form of punishment. Interestingly enough, this decision or choice is being championed, by those who also claim to be champions of the "right of life".

Given this group's representations and

practices of the past, it raises critical concerns, not only as to the core proposition of the death penalty itself as an ethical and moral issue, but also ominous overtones of exactly how the proposed embracement of this plan of death will be executed. We have only to look to Alaska's prison records to see that the minority prison population far exceeds the proportionate status in the overall population. To further compound the issue, prison records show

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that the minority prison population accounts for the overwhelming majority of those crimes that would be classified as "death penalty crimes."

Those championing the Death Penalty Choice have given no indication that they are prepared to discuss solutions or even acknowledge the existing inequities of the judicial system that incarcerates minorities at a rate many times that of the non-minority population. This being so, what assurance can the champions of the Death Penalty possibly give to ensure that their Death Bill will not result in minority executions at the same excessive rate as minority incarcerations.

How can anyone reasonably ask that Alaska's minority citizens agree to a death penalty that executes them at a rate four times greater than non-minorities? What possible justification can there be for this action? Is Alaska being asked to back into the current Bosnia/Serb system of ethnic cleansing? God forbid. What then?

Alaska has lots of problems, for which we all need to focus our limited resources. I respectfully ask the State Senate and House leadership, wouldn't Alaska be better served if we all focused Alaska's shrinking resources, time, and talent on improving the quality of life rather than the quantity of death, in providing running water and flush toilets rather than providing a death penalty and flushing a life. Thank you.