

## OUR VIEW

# Pause betrays campaign promise

## President should commute all federal death sentences

**P**RESIDENT Joe Biden spoke with unwavering clarity during last year's presidential campaign, calling for an end to the federal death penalty, as well as incentives for states to abolish their capital punishment laws. Since becoming President in January, however, Biden has gone silent, even as the U.S. Justice Department last month pushed to re-instate the death penalty for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

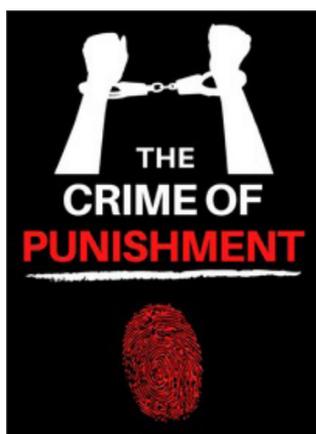


Biden

Biden's backsliding has muddled federal policy on capital punishment, an integral part of criminal justice reform, and sent mixed signals to death penalty states, which hold most of the nation's 2,500 death row prisoners.

Last week, the U.S. Justice Department announced a pause on federal executions; still, the moratorium does not clarify Biden's views or move the government closer to erasing this moral stain.

Even before the moratorium, no federal inmates were scheduled for execution. The DOJ order also does not commute any death sentences or bar fed-



eral prosecutors from seeking them.

To be fair, Biden cannot single-handedly abolish the federal death penalty: A hyper-partisan and divided Congress would first have to approve the legislation. The president can, however, commute the sentences of all 50 federal death row prisoners, converting their sentences to mandatory life-without-parole.

Such decisive action would, in effect, end the federal death penalty for a generation, and send an unequivocal message to the 27 states with death penalty laws, including Penn-



Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, left, stands near a gurney with Greenville Correctional Center warden Larry Edmonds, right, March 24 at the Greenville Correctional Center in Jarratt, Va., prior to signing a bill abolishing the state's death penalty.

sylvania, that this vestige of barbarism should end.

While pausing executions, the Justice Department is conducting yet another death penalty review -- this one examining the permissible methods of federal executions. Given the death penalty's systemic problems, the review is irrelevant. It's time to end government-sponsored killing, not debate whether lethal injection, electrocution, gas, or the firing squad is more cruel.

The federal moratorium also keeps the door open for the next president to launch a rash of federal executions, similar to the 13 undertaken by the Trump Administration during

the last six months of Trump's term. They were the first federal executions in 17 years.

If Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, had acted boldly and commuted all federal death sentences, the executions under Trump could not have gone forward.

Among other things, capital punishment poses unacceptable risks for executing the innocent. More than 180 people on death row have been exonerated since executions resumed in the 1970s, reports the non-profit Death Penalty Information Center. That's about one exoneration for every eight people executed. Imagine a fatal error rate like

that in a federal transportation system. "Any system where the frequency of crashes were that high would be shut down immediately," DPIC Executive Director Robert Dunham told The Herald's editorial page.

Evil triumphs when good people do nothing, 19th-century philosopher John Stuart Mill said.

Once an ardent supporter of the death penalty, Biden is essentially a good man who understands the death penalty's overwhelming flaws. As long as the president continues to do nothing, however, he will prolong an evil that has made the United States a moral outlier among nations.

## THE READERS' VOICE

### Support state Alzheimer's bill

Providing care for an individual living with dementia involves many unique and often challenging elements.

My mother, Janet, 77, has Alzheimer's. As her daughter, I understand how complicated it is to navigate this health care maze. Even as a Registered Nurse, I find it extremely difficult to navigate the medical jungle for my mom.

As of 2020, there were 280,000 Pennsylvanians with Alzheimer's. It is estimated that number will grow to 320,000 by 2025, so it is critical we find better ways to care for them. The bipartisan Comprehensive Care for Alzheimer's Act (S.1125/ H.R.2517) would create a path to better dementia care and address shortcomings in the way dementia care is currently delivered. Dementia care management allows people to more seamlessly navigate the health care and social support systems, and to obtain more timely access to care. Comprehensive care reduces costs while providing better quality care.

This much-needed piece of legislation is fiscally responsible and will make things better for our loved ones.

Please join me and the Alzheimer's Association in asking State Rep. Mike Kelly (R-16th District) to co-sponsor the bipartisan Comprehensive Care for Alzheimer's Act (S.1125/H.R.2517).

To learn more about this disease and how you can join the fight to end Alzheimer's, please visit alz.org and alzimpact.org.

**Melanie Cole**

Sharpsville

## Both parties must improve voting integrity and accessibility

We have a voting crisis in the United States right now, and it's not the story we're being told by Democrats, the media or even Republicans.

It's a crisis of poor and inconsistent voter involvement and engagement. It's a crisis of finding compromise over voter integrity, which clearly does not exist by virtue of Russia's ability to interfere with the 2016 elections and subsequent attempts in 2020. The United States does have problems with its voting, but it's not in the way many think.

During the 2020 presidential election, at least 158.8 million people voted for then-President Donald Trump or for Democratic nominee Joseph Biden. This staggering amount is 20 million more than the 137.5 million who turned out in 2016. It was 25 million more than the 132.9 million who voted in the 2012 election.

Pew Research Center analyzed turnout rates in recent national elections of 35 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a group of self-described democratic and "market-oriented economies." The United States ranked 30th out of 35 nations for which data are available. This is surprising and disappointing, considering the power and wealth of the United States. However, it indicates that our voter crisis is far more complex than what meets the eye.

One of the very first problems we need to address is our low voter turnout and participation. While the 158.8 million that turned out in 2020 might seem impressive, the reality is that 80 million eligible Americans failed to show up to the polls. Too many Americans feel the process is rigged against them, that their vote doesn't matter, and just don't bother to participate at all, which is both an embarrassment and a catastrophe.

The United States should represent the highest form of democratization, which also means having high and consistent voter participation, yet we find ourselves near the bottom of the barrel when compared with other industrialized nations.

While our main focus should be mobilizing and empowering Americans to vote, it is also important to place our attention on Russia and Vladimir Putin, who continuously seek to undermine the free and fair elections of the United States, which, as I see it, is a violation of U.S. sovereignty. A comprehensive look into Russian meddling by our intelligence agencies has made it clear that Russia is a consistent and present threat to the United States,



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

not only by continuous attempts at interfering but also by spreading disinformation in an attempt to divide Americans based on their race and their ideological differences.

Russia has perhaps proven itself to be the greatest adversary in the history of the United States. Russia's ability to infiltrate the United States in a way that has turned the country on itself from the inside out is akin to a third world war, even in the absence of any missiles being launched or troops being sent onto foreign soil. Our immediate attention should focus on how to thwart Russia's continued attempts to create chaos within the United States as it attempts to reignite global Russian supremacy. However unlikely that may be, Putin's Russia has been effective at one thing, and that's weakening the United States by attacking our election process and sowing internal discord.

I point out each of these things not because I don't believe that having fair elections is an essential part of democratic republic but because I believe that they, too, warrant our immediate attention, though they have gone ignored when compared to voter ID laws. From my perspective, having voter ID laws isn't racist in nature, and requiring citizens to verify and show proof of who they are shouldn't be a partisan issue.

With that being said, however, I do believe that we must make access to IDs and other forms of identification easy, particularly for the poor and elderly. If we are able to accomplish this, I strongly believe that most people would have no problem with showcasing proof of identity to vote. It's not a burden as long as people have easy access and the means to procure said requirements. Additionally, I disagree with states that prohibit people giving out water or basic snacks to people waiting to vote. It just seems unnecessarily cruel, particularly in areas where people wait in line!

There are places where people wait for hours and hours to cast their vote, so this is another thing we need to fix. It just doesn't make sense that people have to wait in lines all day to vote. Maybe if we had a federal voting holiday where everyone was off and could vote, we could see historic numbers and consistent participation. Whatever we ultimately decide, we must compromise and create a system that works for all Americans regardless of race and socioeconomic status.

A safe, but reasonably strong system is beneficial to our country and to all Americans. Regardless of whether your vote is cast for a Democrat or a Republican, each American has something to gain by strengthening our election process. Everyone wins and the country is better off when all voices can be fairly heard.

To be abundantly clear, this isn't a partisan issue, but an American issue. The sooner we put partisanship to the side, the better off we are. Combatting Russia, consistently improving voter turnout and engagement, and making an efficient and streamlined process for voters should be our focus.

To find out more about Armstrong Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).

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## TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Monday, July 8, the 189th day of 2019.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 8, 1947, a New Mexico newspaper, the Roswell Daily Record, quoted officials at Roswell Army Air Field as saying they had recovered a "flying saucer" that crashed onto a ranch; officials then said it was actually a weather balloon. (To this day, there are those who believe what fell to Earth was an alien spaceship carrying extra-terrestrial beings.)

On this date:

In 1776, Col. John Nixon gave the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence, outside the State House (now Independence Hall) in Philadelphia.

In 1911, cowgirl "Two-Gun Nan" Aspinwall became the first woman to make a solo trip by horse across the United States, arriving in New York 10 months after departing San Francisco.

In 1950, President Harry S. Truman named Gen. Douglas MacArthur commander-in-chief of United Nations forces in Korea. (Truman ended up sacking MacArthur for insubordination nine months later.)

In 1965, Canadian Pacific Air Lines Flight 21, a Douglas DC-6B, crashed in British Columbia after the tail separated from the fuselage; all 52 people on board were killed in what authorities said was the result of an apparent bombing.

The Associated Press

