

# Abolition Alert

## House Bill 9 Would Bring the Death Penalty to Alaska for the First Time Since Statehood

House Speaker Mike Chenault has sponsored House Bill 9, a bill to reinstate the death penalty in Alaska. The bill is presently before the House Judiciary Committee, which has taken testimony during three hearings in February and March, 2009. Further testimony will be taken – but the dates of future hearings have not yet been announced. Contact Sue Johnson (scjohnson@gci.net) if you want to be put on an e-mail alert list so you find out when the next hearings are to be held.

Governor Palin's office has stated that HB 9 is not a priority. However, indications are that such a bill would be supported by her office. There has been no public opposition to the bill from any state agency.

AADP members and friends are encouraged to actively participate in all of the legislative activity on this bill, by testifying in person or in writing, by coming to the hearings and observing, and/or by writing e-mails, letters, and letters to the editor. If you would like to help, but aren't sure what's needed, please contact Sue Johnson.

Many Alaskans have been active in opposing reinstatement of the death penalty, including the members and board of AADP, and many others as well. Thank you to

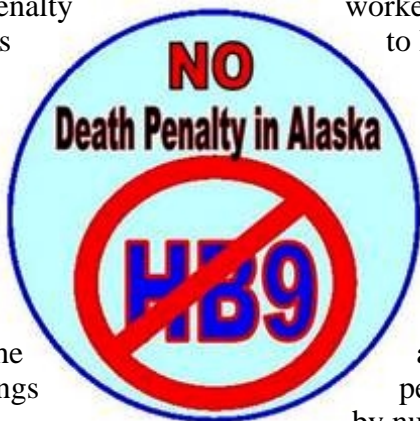
the folks who donated money, testified in person or in writing, worked on strategy, wrote to legislators and to newspapers, volunteered, provided consultation and lobbying, and prepared resolutions opposing the death penalty. Resolutions against the death penalty were issued by numerous groups, including the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Municipality of Anchorage, the National Association of Colored People, the Alaska Civil Liberties Union, the Native Village of Ambler, the Central

Conference of American Rabbis, the Episcopal Church, and the Quakers.

Eighty people were prepared to testify before the House Judiciary Committee throughout the state. Thanks to Art Koeninger and to Erick Cordero, for coordinating testimony from people in Homer and Mat-Su. Although only a few people were called on to testify after three days of hearings, the presence of people waiting to testify is a powerful message in its own right. There will be additional opportunities to testify.

Sue Johnson, AADP Coordinator, met with twenty-seven legislators and/or staff members

■ *Continued on page 3 ...*



### Contact information for the members of the House Judiciary Committee:

**CHAIR: Representative Ramras**

Representative\_Jay\_Ramras@legis.state.ak.us

**VICE-CHAIR: Representative Dahlstrom**

Representative\_Nancy\_Dahlstrom@legis.state.ak.us

**MEMBERS:**

**Representative Coghill**

Representative\_John\_Coghill@legis.state.ak.us

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Representative\_Bob\_Lynn@legis.state.ak.us

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**Representative Gruenberg**

Representative\_Max\_Gruenberg@legis.state.ak.us

**Representative Holmes**

Representative\_Lindsey\_Holmes@legis.state.ak.us

## AADP Website

[www.AADP.info/](http://www.AADP.info/)

## AADP Board of Directors

**Hugh Fleischer**  
**Kathy Harris**  
**Cara McNamara**  
**Jamie McGrady**  
**Blanche Crandall**  
**Bill Pelke**  
**Rich Curtner**  
**Erika Kahill**  
**Sue C. Johnson,**  
*Coordinator*

Thank you to **Erick Cordero** for all his efforts while he briefly served our our Board, including work on our Web site. Check out our FACEBOOK Concerned Alaskans Against the Death Penalty.

We are always looking for new board members. Let Sue Johnson know if you are interested:  
[scjohnson@gci.net](mailto:scjohnson@gci.net).

## Saving Trees & Time

Would you be interested in receiving your newsletter via e-mail? If so, please tear off your address label, include your e-mail address and send it to us.

# AADP is Hosting Denise LeBoeuf at the Annual Dinner Dance in Girdwood — Friday, April 10th



AADP's annual Dinner Dance will be held on Friday, April 10, 2009, at the Hotel Alyeska, in Girdwood. This is held in conjunction with the Trial Lawyers Conference. **Tickets are \$65 each and seating is limited, so please reserve your seat now** by contacting any board member or e-mailing Sue at [scjohnson@gci.net](mailto:scjohnson@gci.net). Reception begins at 5:00 p.m. There will be a brief business meeting and dinner at 6:00 p.m., with Denise LeBoeuf as our keynote speaker. Dinner will be followed by music and dancing.



Deni is a capital defender with a private practice in New Orleans, Louisiana; she was the founding Director of the Capital Post-Conviction Project of Louisiana and is currently of counsel to that defender organization. She represents persons facing death at trial and in post-conviction in state and federal courts, teaches and consults with capital defense teams nationally. She is particularly interested in the litigation of mental healthcases and in the ways in which race and poverty increase the traumatic burden carried by many clients. Deni was a member of the 2003 Committee that formulated the ABA Guidelines for the Appointment and Performance of Defense Counsel in Death Penalty Cases, and Chair of the post-Katrina Orleans Parish Indigent Defender Board 2006-2007. She holds a B.A. from Hunter College and a J.D. from Tulane University.

Deni is past President and past General Counsel of the Louisiana American Civil Liberties Union, and was a Member of the Board of the ACLU for a number of years. She was the Chair of the Orleans Parish Public Defenders Board post-Katrina, a member of the Executive Board of the Moratorium Campaign, a member of the Board of the People's Institute for Survival, an Undoing Racism Organization, and the Louisiana Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. In 2006 she was of counsel to the ACLU Capital Punishment Project in Durham, North Carolina.

## Chaplain Carroll Pickett Visits Alaska

Chaplain Carroll Pickett (featured in the award winning documentary film: *At the Death House Door*) served 15 years as the death house chaplain at the infamous "Walls" prison unit in Huntsville. During Pickett's remarkable career journey leading to his conclusion that the death penalty should be abolished, he presided over 95 executions, including the world's first lethal injection. After each execution, Pickett recorded an audiotape account of his trip to the death chamber.

Chaplain Pickett, and his wife, Jane, joined Alaskans in many gatherings while here in March. They were hosted by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's church all day on March 8th, and then joined the annual Chili Feed that night. While in Juneau March 10-13, we met with most of our state legislators. Also, with help from Father Thomas, former State Representative Andrea Doll and Phil Smith, several evening events were held in honor of Reverend Corroll Pickett and his wife, Jane.



*We had a huge crowd at our Chili Feed and our donations were twice what they were for last year's event!*

*Thanks for your support!*

### ■ *House Bill 9 continued . . .*

while in Juneau in February. She was accompanied by Bill Pelke for two of the four and a half days in Juneau. Johnson and Pelke each testified before the House Judiciary Committee.

The AADP sponsored a visit to Juneau March 10-13 by Reverend and Jane Pickett, who were accompanied by Sue Johnson and Jeff Mittman from the ACLU. HB 9 was not being heard during that time, but they were able to visit with many legislators. During the two trips to Juneau, all but ten legislators and/or their staffs have given their time to AADP to discuss the bill. Reverend Pickett was also able to spend some time in the hall with the bill sponsor, Rep. Chenault. Father Thomas from the Nativity Catholic Church in Juneau hosted a public meeting in honor of Reverend Pickett on March 10th. There were approximately 50 residents who were interested in hearing from Reverend Pickett and getting an update on HB 9.

On Wednesday, March 11th, we showed the film

*At The Death House Door* at a local theater in Juneau. This event was hosted by Father Thomas and by former Alaska Representative Andrea Doll. The theater was nearly full and Reverend Pickett graciously took on questions from the audience. Interviews were done with Reverend Pickett on Thursday morning by KXLJ a new TV/Radio station in Juneau. There is a strong feeling both within the Juneau community and in the capital building that HB 9 is not well-liked.

AADP is truly grateful for opportunity to host the Pickett's and for the help and assistance from our supporters in Juneau.

If HB 9 is passed by the House Judiciary Committee, it will move on to the House Finance Committee, and further testimony will be required. Please feel free to contact Sue Johnson at 276-5753, or at the e-mail address set out above, if you would like to submit written testimony or if you have any thoughts or ideas about House Bill 9.

## AADP Board Attended January NCADP Conference in Harrisburg, PA

The timing on the Harrisburg trip could not have been better. We gained lots of knowledge to help us in fighting HB 9. We met many exonerees, death house wardens, authors, film-makers, Sister Helen Prejean and more.

Our much loved abolitionist, Rachel King, was appropriately honored at the closing banquet and a fund has been established in her name. For more information, follow the link: <http://www.google.com/search?sourceid+navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz+1T4ADBR enUS303US304&q=r>

Thanks to all of you who contributed airline miles to make this trip possible and thanks to the NCADP staff for hosting such a wonderful event.



Exoneree Juan Menendez and his mother at the NCADP Conference.



Alaska Delegation at the NCADP Conference: (standing) Sue Johnson, Hugh Fleischer, Evans Wohlforth, Bill Pelke, Jamie McGrady, Erika Kahill, (sitting) Pam Sullivan, Rich Curtner, Claudia Whitman & Mary Margaret Stein.



***Seeking Auction Items . . .***

***for the April 10th Dinner Dance and  
this summer's Fish Fry.***

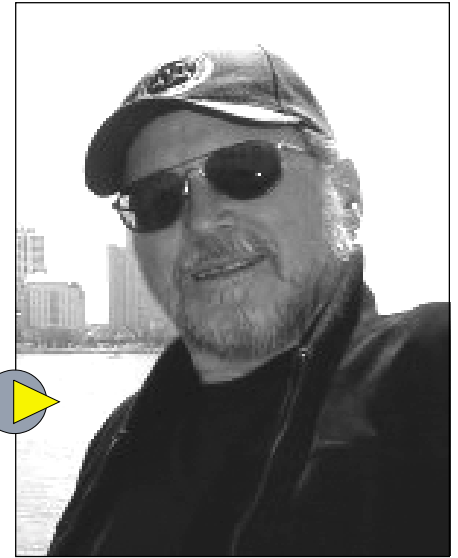
***If you have items to donate, contact Sue at  
scjohnson@gci.net.***



## Speakers in the Queue

*The following speakers are in the queue and interested in helping us fight HB 9. We will bring them to Alaska this year if needed and if we are able to raise necessary funds to do so.*

Along with three co-defendants, **Ron Keine** (at the NCADP Conference) was convicted of the murder, kidnapping, sodomy and rape of University of New Mexico student William Velten in 1974 and was sentenced to die in New Mexico's gas chamber. At the time of the murder, Ron was traveling through New Mexico with friends from California. "We were having fun, raising hell and drinking beer. But we weren't killers." Throughout the trial, Ron maintained his innocence. He was unable to believe that he might be found guilty. "I didn't think they could convict four innocent men and sentence them to death," he says. "I had faith in the American justice system. Now I know it's corrupt and broken. I don't believe the government should kill people."

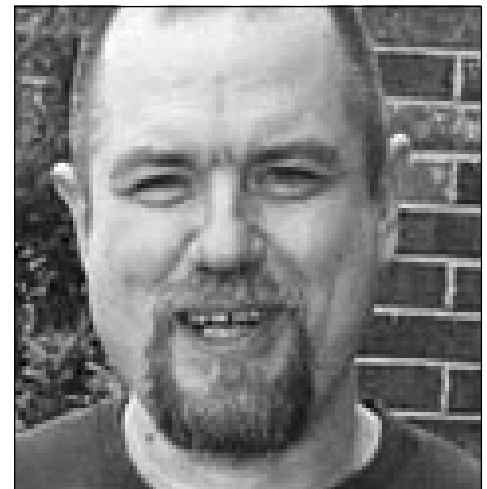


Former Bexar County (Texas) District Attorney **Sam Millsap** used to support the death penalty, but in the past few years, he has toured the country speaking to audiences about why he now believes in the complete abolition of capital punishment. Though Millsap says this conversion came over a series of years, he credits a specific case as the catalyst to turning him into an outspoken opponent of the death penalty.

Ruben Cantu was convicted and executed in 1993 based on compelling eyewitness testimony while Millsap was D.A. But 12 years later, an eyewitness recanted and, though Millsap says there is no way of deciding what version of the truth to believe, the very nature of human error makes it impossible for the system to protect the innocent completely. While in Pennsylvania, Millsap, along with Barry Scheck from The Innocence Project and

20 former convicts who spent time on death row before being acquitted of all crimes, announced the launch of the Pennsylvania Death Penalty Moratorium Coalition.

**Curtis Edward McCarty** (at the NCADP Conference) was exonerated in 2007 after serving 21 years – including 19 years on death row – for a 1982 Oklahoma City murder he didn't commit. McCarty was convicted twice and sentenced to death three times based on prosecutorial misconduct and testimony from forensic analyst Joyce Gilchrist, whose lab misconduct has contributed to at least two other convictions later overturned by DNA evidence.



# **A**laskans Against the Death Penalty

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## ■ *Speakers in the Queue* continued from page 5. . .



**Ron McAndrew** (spoke at the NCADP Conference) is a retired Interim Director of Orange County (Florida) Corrections and was warden at the three largest prisons in terms of budget, with overall responsibility and certainly most difficult of prisons in Florida. Climbing from the bottom rung of correctional officer to warden, he championed progressive change at Florida State Prison. His gut level experience challenges excuses for nonfeasance — or — malfeasance in correctional settings. McAndrew is a career civil rights advocate and worked as an investigator for corrections.