

November 25, 2014

The Honorable Rick Perry
Office of the Governor
P. O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Perry:

We respectfully ask you to commute Scott Panetti's death sentence to life in prison if the Board of Pardons and Paroles recommends it. Mr. Panetti is one of the most seriously mentally ill prisoners on death row in the United States. Rather than serving as a measured response to murder, the execution of Mr. Panetti would only serve to undermine the public's faith in a fair and moral justice system.

Each of us has been active at the national level of the conservative movement for many years, and no one could accuse us of being soft on crime. Among conservatives there is much debate about the effectiveness and the morality of the death penalty. Some crimes are so terrible, and committed with such clear malice, that some believe that execution seems the only appropriate and proportional response. But Scott Panetti's is no such case.

Panetti has a documented history of mental illness going back to when he was 20 years old. In the subsequent decades he has been involuntarily hospitalized on fourteen separate occasions. His diagnoses include chronic schizophrenia, paranoia, hallucinations and fragmented personality, for which he was prescribed high doses of powerful psychiatric drugs for schizophrenia. He was termed manic and delusional. He heard voices and thought he was controlled by an unseen power. Panetti once nailed the curtains shut in his house to seal out the devil. It is clear that he has been suffering from severe mental illness since long before he committed the offense that landed him on death row.

In 1986, for example, Panetti believed he was engaged in spiritual warfare with Satan and he was convinced that the devil was in his home, leading his wife to sign an affidavit to have him involuntarily committed. She testified that he attempted to exorcize his home with a series of inexplicable behaviors, including burying his furniture in the backyard. Bizarre manifestations of his illness continued - virtually unabated - right up until the tragic day on which he killed his wife's parents in 1992.

Despite this long record of mental illness, Panetti was found competent to be tried and to waive his right to counsel. Incredibly the Texas trial court allowed this delusional man to present his own "defense". His courtroom behavior was bizarre. He wore a costume of a purple cowboy suit and bandana to the trial. He picked one juror with the flip of a coin. He attempted to subpoena over 200 witnesses including John Kennedy, the Pope, and Jesus Christ. He slept through some of the testimony.

This was no act cooked up to get him off of murder charges. His severe mental illness is thoroughly documented in his medical records. And his delusions persist. Now, just days away from his scheduled execution, Panetti continues to suffer from the manifestations of his mental illness, believing that he will be executed for preaching the Gospels to his fellow prisoners, not for the murder of his in-laws.

The authority to take a man's life is the most draconian penalty that we allow our government to exercise. As conservatives, we must be on guard that such an extraordinary government sanction not be used against a person who is mentally incapable of rational thought. It would be immoral for the government to take this man's life. Should the Board recommend it, we respectfully urge you to reduce Mr. Panetti's death sentence to life in prison.

Sincerely,

Brent Bozell, President, For America
Ken Cuccinelli, President, Senate Conservatives Fund
Dave Keene, Opinion Editor, *The Washington Times*
Pat Nolan, Director Center for Criminal Justice Reform, the American Conservative Union Foundation
Richard Viguerie, Chairman, ConservativeHQ.com
Ron Robinson, President, Young America's Foundation
Jim Miller, Budget Director for President Ronald Reagan
Craig Shirley, Reagan Biographer
C. Preston Noell, III, President, Tradition, Family, Property, Inc.
Rebecca Hagelin, Columnist, *The Washington Times*
Floyd Brown, President, Western Center for Journalism
Charles Murray, WH Brady Scholar, American Enterprise Institute
Patrick A. Trueman, Attorney At Law
Mark L. Earley, Sr., Former Attorney General of Virginia and
Former President and CEO of Prison Fellowship USA
Morton Blackwell, Chairman, The Weyrich Lunch
James L. Martin, Chairman, 60 Plus Association
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