

US: Texas resumes executions following nine-month pause

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Karl Eugene Chamberlain was put to death in the execution chamber in Huntsville, Texas Wednesday evening. With his lethal injection, Texas authorities have restarted the wheels of state-sanctioned killings in that state following a nine-month hiatus.

Executions were on hold across the US while the US Supreme Court considered a Kentucky case challenging the constitutionality of the lethal injection procedure. Chamberlain, 37, was the sixth death row prisoner executed in the US since the high court ruled in April that lethal injection does not violate the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

Karl Chamberlain was convicted in the 1991 rape and murder of his neighbor, Felecia Prechtle, 30, in her Far East Dallas apartment. "I've never said I was innocent," Chamberlain told the Associated Press in an earlier death row interview. "My greatest regret is that I went down there in the first place and didn't have the courage to kill myself instead."

He said, "There was so much from my childhood and my life the jury never heard." He told AP he was raped at the age of five and molested repeatedly, and was berated by his stepfather who called him a "son of Satan."

Karl Chamberlain was administered the toxic mix of chemicals just after 6 p.m. local time Wednesday. As he awaited injection of the drugs, he said, "We are here to honor the life of Felicia Prechtl, a woman I didn't even know, and celebrate my death. I am so terribly sorry. I wish I could die more than once."

Chamberlain had previously been scheduled to be executed in February, but the Dallas district attorney had asked that his execution date be rescheduled awaiting the Supreme Court decision.

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals refused late Monday to halt Chamberlain's execution. This

followed another ruling by the court on Monday in the case of death row inmate Heliberto Chi, who had challenged the constitutionality of the Texas lethal-injection procedure. The court ruled that Kentucky's procedure is "materially indistinguishable from Texas' lethal injection protocol," effectively lifting the ban on executions in the state.

In addition to vacating Karl Chamberlain's stay of execution, the Texas court also lifted a stay issued last week for prisoner Derrick Juan Sonnier. Sonnier, 40, was only two hours away from execution on June 3 when the state court halted it. The state is requesting a new date be set for his execution.

Between now and October 16, Texas has 12 more executions scheduled. Texas carried out 26 of the 42 executions nationwide last year, the most of any state, and has carried out 407 of the 1,103 executions that have taken place in the US since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976.

George W. Bush presided over 152 of these executions during his five years as Texas governor before becoming president. It is fitting that in his final months in office his home state is again revving up the killing machine.

In addition to the 12 executions scheduled between now and mid-October in Texas, other states with scheduled executions are: Oklahoma (2), Virginia (4), Florida (1), Louisiana (2), and South Dakota (1). Two executions are scheduled for next Tuesday, June 17: Terry Lyn Short in Oklahoma, and Charles Hood in Texas.

Virginia Governor Timothy Kaine commuted the death sentence of Percy Walton to life in prison without parole. Walton had been scheduled to be executed on June 10. The governor stated that because of significant evidence pointing to Walton's schizophrenia "one

cannot reasonably conclude that [he] is fully aware of the punishment he is about to suffer and why he is to suffer it.”

The US Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that execution of the mentally retarded is unconstitutional. However, two of the six inmates sent to their deaths since executions resumed on May 6 had well-documented histories of mental retardation: Earl Wesley Berry, 49, executed in Mississippi on May 21, and Kevin Green, 31, put to death in Virginia on May 27.

The US Supreme Court ruled 7-2 on April 16 in the Kentucky case, *Baze v. Rees*, that Kentucky’s lethal injection procedure does not violate the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution’s ban on “cruel and unusual punishment.” As states awaited the high court ruling, a moratorium on executions was in effect nationwide, and the long-anticipated decision was widely interpreted as a green light for them to proceed. The lethal injection procedure is the method used by the 36 US states that still practice capital punishment, as well as the federal government.

In its ruling, the high court affirmed not only its approval of the lethal injection method, but its support for the barbaric capital punishment practice as a whole. In the majority opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, “Some risk of pain is inherent in any method of execution—no matter how humane—if only from the prospect of error in following the required procedure. It is clear, then, that the Constitution does not demand the avoidance of all risk of pain in carrying out executions.”

This risk of pain was demonstrated in the execution last Wednesday of Curtis Osborne in Georgia. Osborne’s execution, scheduled for 7 p.m., June 4, was delayed for 55 minutes while the US Supreme Court reviewed his final appeal, which they rejected. Executioners then spent 35 minutes attempting to find a suitable vein through which to inject the lethal chemicals. Osborne was pronounced dead at 9:05 p.m.

Opponents of the lethal-injection procedure argue that the three-drug protocol can cause severe pain if not administered properly. The first injection, the barbiturate sodium thiopental, is intended to induce unconsciousness. However, if the chemical is not properly injected into the vein there is a possibility the prisoner will be awake and suffer severe pain during the injection of the other toxic chemicals: pancuronium

bromide, which renders the prisoner completely immobile and causes suffocation, and potassium chloride, which induces a massive heart attack and also causes a severe burning sensation in the veins.

Lethal injection procedures violate veterinary standards in virtually all of the US states that practice capital punishment, and are overwhelmingly banned in the euthanasia of animals. The Death Penalty Information Center has documented 41 cases of botched lethal injections. All of the condemned prisoners on death row with execution dates will be put to death by lethal injection.



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