

Texas carries out its tenth execution of 2015

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On Wednesday, Texas carried out the execution of Daniel Lee Lopez, the 10th death row inmate put to death in the state so far this year. Lopez, 27, was convicted and sentenced to death for the 2009 murder of Corpus Christi police Lt. Stuart Alexander.

Lopez was injected with a single dose of pentobarbital at the Walls Unit of the state prison in Huntsville. As the drugs took effect, he took two deep breaths, followed by two shallower breaths, after which all movement ceased. He was pronounced dead at 6:31 p.m. local time, 15 minutes after the lethal injection began.

As the condemned inmate was strapped to the gurney in the execution chamber, the roar of revving motorcycles on the street outside could be heard from a group of pro-police bikers.

Lopez was considered a death penalty “volunteer,” having written letters to a federal judge pleading for his execution to move forward. “I’ve accepted my fate,” he said shortly before his execution. “I’m just ready to move on.” Last week he said that a US Supreme Court reprieve would be “disappointing.”

The execution went forward after the US Supreme Court rejected appeals from Lopez’s attorneys for a stay. Attorney David Dow argued before the high court that his client’s “obvious and severe mental illness” was responsible for him wanting to use the legal system for suicide” and that he had a “well-documented history of irrational behavior and suicidal tendencies.”

Dow also argued that Lopez’s crime was not a capital murder, as Lopez hadn’t intended to kill the police officer. Alexander and Lopez fought during the course of a police stop, and when Lopez was cornered by police, he tried ramming his sport utility vehicle into police cars in an effort to escape.

The Neuces County District Attorney pushed for Lopez’s execution, saying: “He had no moral scruples, no nothing... He’s a bad, bad guy.” Arguing against

delays in Lopez’s execution, state attorneys claimed that the inmate had been properly examined by a psychologist, had testified at a federal court hearing about his desire to drop appeals, and was found to have no mental defects.

Lopez may have had another motivation for his “volunteer” status. According to the Associated Press, he told one of his former girlfriends that he wanted the death penalty because he believed his children would be eligible for benefits after his execution.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), since the US reinstated the death penalty in 1976, 141 of those executed in the US have been “volunteers,” having continued to waive at least part of their ordinary appeals at the time of their execution. These condemned inmates considered death preferable to languishing on death row for years or decades while their appeals made their way through the courts.

Another Texas execution scheduled this week was halted by an order of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on Tuesday. Tracy Beatty, 54, had been set to die Thursday for the 2003 death of 62-year-old Carolyn Click. Her body was found buried near her trailer home in Smith County outside Tyler, Texas.

Beatty’s attorneys argued that their client had deficient legal help at his 2004 trial and during appeals and that prosecutors used improper testimony at his trial.

Daniel Lopez’s execution means that Texas accounts for more than half of the 19 executions carried out in the US so far this year. Texas has executed 10, followed by Missouri, 5; Georgia, 2; and Florida and Oklahoma with one each.

Of the 1,413 executions carried out in the US since 1976, 528 have been in Texas. Twenty-nine of those sent to their deaths in Texas have been “volunteers,” according to DPIC.



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