

Oklahoma death row prisoner John Grant vomits, convulses in death chamber as state resumes executions

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Death row prisoner John Marion Grant was put to death Thursday by the state of Oklahoma in a gruesome lethal injection, during which he vomited and convulsed on the execution gurney, to the horror of witnesses.

Grant, 60, was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1998 stabbing death of prison cafeteria worker Gay Carter. He was already serving a 130-year sentence for several armed robberies at the time.

The execution proceeded after the US Supreme Court, in a 5-3 decision, with the court's three liberal judges dissenting, lifted stays of execution that were put in place on Wednesday for Grant and another death row inmate by the 10th US Circuit Court of Appeals. The state's Pardon and Parole Board twice denied Grant's request for clemency.

Grant was the first condemned prisoner to meet his death at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary's new "state of the art" execution chamber, built expressly to facilitate the resumption of executions after a series of botched executions in 2014-2015.

Grant was injected with a toxic cocktail of midazolam, vecuronium bromide and potassium chloride. Dan Snyder, an anchor at the local Fox 25 TV channel, who witnessed the execution, said that the procedure went drastically awry as soon as the first drug, midazolam, a sedative, was injected.

"Almost immediately after the drug was administered, Grant began convulsing, so much so that his entire upper back repeatedly lifted off the gurney," Snyder reported. "As the convulsions continued, Grant then began to vomit. Multiple times over the course of the next few minutes medical staff entered the death chamber to wipe away and remove vomit from the still-

breathing Grant."

It took 15 minutes, according to Snyder, for Grant to be declared unconscious by medical staff. Then he was injected with vecuronium bromide, which paralyzes the body, and potassium chloride, which stops the heart. He was pronounced dead at 4:21 p.m. The Associated Press (AP) quoted an email by Corrections spokesman Justin Wolf, who said the execution "was carried out in accordance with Oklahoma Department of Correction's protocols and without complication."

Snyder countered the state's claim, writing on Twitter, "As a witness to the execution who was in the room, I'll say this: repeated convulsions and extensive vomiting for nearly 15 minutes would not seem to be 'without complication.'" Michael Cracsyk, a retired AP reporter who still covers executions as a freelancer, told CBS News he has witnessed about 450 executions and could only remember one time when a prisoner vomited during an execution.

Oklahoma has carried out 112 executions since 1976, when the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment. From witness accounts, it appears that Grant's execution was in line with the gruesome executions in Oklahoma that directly proceeded the six-year moratorium.

On April 29, 2014, Clayton Lockett writhed and groaned on the execution gurney as Oklahoma injected midazolam for the first time in an execution. Lockett's lawyer reported that "his whole upper body was lifting off the table." It was later determined that the doctor and paramedic had made numerous attempts to inject midazolam. The prison director halted the execution, but Lockett died 43 minutes later, apparently from a heart attack.

The execution of Charles Warner, scheduled for the same day, was postponed and eventually rescheduled for January 15, 2015. According to AP reporter Sean Murphy, who witnessed the execution, once the midazolam was injected, Warner called out, “My body is on fire. No one should go through this.” Warner’s last words were, “They poked me five times. It feels like acid.” The *Oklahoman* reported on October 8, 2015 that the state had used potassium acetate, not potassium chloride, to execute Warner.

The US Supreme Court, which sanctioned the execution of John Grant, ruled 5-4 in June 2015 in *Glossip v. Gross* that midazolam could be used in executions. Attorneys for three Oklahoma inmates had argued that midazolam could not achieve the level of unconsciousness required in executions to proceed with the other two drugs, leading to prolonged and excruciating pain contrary to the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

In March 2018, Oklahoma officials announced plans to develop protocols to use nitrogen gas to execute prisoners, but they eventually chose the three-drug protocol, including midazolam, in lethal injection as the first choice.

The Supreme Court ruling that allowed Grant’s execution to proceed also lifted the stay of execution for Julius Jones, 41. Jones’s execution is scheduled for November 18. Jones was convicted of a murder that occurred when he was a teenager. He has consistently maintained his innocence and his case has gained national notoriety. Oklahoma has six more executions scheduled for 2021 and 2022.



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