

James Coddington executed in Oklahoma: The first of 25 state killings set through 2024

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James Coddington, 50, was executed at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester on Thursday morning. He is one of 25 men set to die through 2024 in Oklahoma in what can only be described as an assembly line of death. Coddington was executed despite a recommendation from the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board that his life be spared.

Coddington was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of his friend and coworker Albert Hale, 73. Coddington was 24 at the time and addicted to cocaine. He beat Hale to death when he refused to give him money for drugs. After killing Hale, Coddington proceeded to commit at least six armed robberies at gas stations and convenience stores across Oklahoma City.

Kevin Stitt, Oklahoma's Republican governor, declined to commute Coddington's sentence to life in prison without parole despite a 3-2 recommendation from the Pardon and Parole Board. The governor also rejected the condemned inmate's petition for clemency.

According to media witnesses to the execution, in his final words Coddington thanked his family, friends and lawyers and addressed Stitt, saying, "I don't blame you, and I forgive you."

After the first drug, the sedative midazolam, was injected into Coddington, his breathing became labored, and his chest heaved several times, according to Associated Press witness Sean Murphy. A doctor declared him unconscious at 10:08 a.m., and the prisoner could then be heard snoring. He was pronounced dead at 10:16 a.m. by Department of Corrections Director Scott Crow.

Like many of those executed in the US, Coddington suffered an abusive childhood. During his hearing before the Pardon and Parole Board, his attorney Emma Rolls recounted how her client was impaired by years

of alcohol and drug abuse, which began as an infant when his father put beer and whiskey in his baby bottles.

Coddington was the fifth Oklahoma inmate to be put to death since the state resumed executions last year. The gruesome execution of Charles Warner on January 15, 2015 prompted the state's temporary moratorium as it sought to refine its execution machine.

According to an AP witness, during the lethal injection Warner cried out, "My body is on fire. No one should go through this." His last words were, "They poked me five times. It feels like acid."

Oklahoma's executions were put on hold after Warner's execution. Later in January 2015, the US Supreme Court announced that it would hear a challenge to the state's three-drug lethal injection protocol by a group of Oklahoma death row inmates, who claimed that the process constituted cruel and unusual punishment, which is banned by the Eighth Amendment to the US Constitution.

The inmates' case, originally named *Warner v. Gross*, was renamed *Glossip v. Gross* after Warner's execution. In June 2015, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that executions using midazolam could go forward, despite substantial evidence that use of the sedative can cause excruciating pain and prolonged suffering.

Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the majority, argued that the prisoners had failed to make the case that the use of the drug entailed a substantial risk of serious pain. Perversely, Alito also asserted that the prisoners had no claim as they had not presented a viable alternative for their own execution.

Oklahoma resumed executions with the lethal injection of John Grant, 60, on October 28, 2021. Grant's execution proceeded after the US Supreme Court, in a 5-3 decision, lifted stays of execution that

had been put in place for Grant and another death row inmate by the 10th US Circuit Court of Appeals.

Grant was the first prisoner to die by lethal injection at Oklahoma State Penitentiary's new "state of the art" execution chamber, built expressly to facilitate the resumption of executions after a series of grisly lethal injections in 2014-2015. However, the revamped state-killing suite, built at a cost of more than \$100,000, did not prevent another gruesome execution from taking place.

Grant was injected with the same toxic cocktail of the sedative midazolam, followed by vecuronium bromide, a paralytic, and potassium chloride to induce cardiac arrest. Witness Dan Snyder, a local Fox television anchor, reported: "Almost immediately after [midazolam] was administered, Grant began convulsing, so much so that his entire upper back repeatedly lifted off the gurney. 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."

Medical experts testified in federal court earlier this year that autopsies of the four Oklahoma prisoners put to death since the resumption of executions in 2021 (excluding Coddington)—John Grant, Bigler Stouffer, Donald Grant (no relation to John Grant) and Gilbert Postelle—showed that all four had an abnormal buildup of fluid in their lungs, or pulmonary edema, meaning that they were effectively killed by drowning.

The experts said that frothing could only occur if "the prisoner is alive and breathing" when the edema occurred. An NPR analysis of the autopsies of more than 200 US prisoners executed by lethal injection found that 84 percent showed evidence of pulmonary edema. And in the case of lethal injections involving midazolam, pulmonary edema was even more prevalent.

The Death Penalty Information Center reported that Dr. Gail Van Norman, professor of anesthesiology and pain medicine at the University of Washington Medical School, testified to a "'virtual medical certainty' that the four prisoners executed under Oklahoma's current protocol 'experienced extreme pain and suffering.'"

The state of Oklahoma now intends to continue the march of two dozen prisoners to their torturous deaths at a rate of about one a month over the next two years

with this same barbaric execution protocol.

There has been no protest from the White House over the planned executions of these and other prisoners who are scheduled to meet their deaths in execution chambers in states across the US in the coming months and years. Joe Biden—who pledged during his presidential campaign to work "to pass legislation to eliminate the death penalty at the federal level, and incentivize states to follow" that example—has instead remained silent, lending his tacit approval to the practice.

Similarly, the brutal execution of 81 individuals on March 13 this year by the Saudi monarchy and its murderous ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman evoked no outcry from the Biden administration. The standard execution methods in Saudi Arabia, an ally of American imperialism in the Middle East, are beheading by sword and public hangings.

Those put to death in Saudi Arabia have been convicted of "terrorism"-related crimes, as well as crimes such as "disrupting the social fabric and national cohesion" and "participating in and inciting sit-ins and protests," which describe acts that should be protected by rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Executions are meted out in the US and internationally against society's most vulnerable—the poor, the addicted, the intellectually disabled—and political opponents of repressive regimes. Above all, the brutal practice is aimed against the working class and the challenge it poses to capitalist rule and police repression. The Socialist Equality Party condemns capital punishment in all its forms and by all methods.



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