

# Lifelines

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL COALITION TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY • NUMBER 104 • FALL 2010

## Largest Gathering of Death Penalty Abolitionists to Meet in Chicago at NCADP's January Conference

BY AIMEE GABEL, TRAINING CONSULTANT, NCADP

Just as runners move faster when speeding down a hill, our movement is rapidly gaining momentum, accelerating the nation toward abolition. Along the way we are taking advantage of the significant progress we have already made: building coalitions, changing the dynamics of the death penalty debate, and increasing public concern about the practice. In the third and final year of NCADP's conference theme, *Training for the Long Run*, the 2011 meeting, *Building Momentum for Repeal*, will continue this drive through high-level policy analysis, practical workshops and campaign mini-tracks.

The 2011 Annual Conference takes place January 13-16, at the Renaissance Chicago Hotel (\$99/night for up to four people per room). Affiliate registration (see NCADP's website: [ncadp.org](http://ncadp.org)) is underway.

NCADP's staff continues to work closely with the state Affiliate, the Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, which is co-sponsoring the event, to coordinate state and national goals, make best use of local resources, and gather additional ideas and support. The Conference's substantive agenda and 30-plus workshops will focus on several tracks to support specific learning objectives.

"For a half-dozen years our Annual Conference has been the must-attend event where the movement's leaders and activists share

experiences, ideas and best practices," notes Diann Rust-Tierney, NCADP Executive Director. "We're honored that so many of our friends can join us."

"NCADP training and support is invaluable to my work," says Donald Vish, Kentucky Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty's Director of Outreach, Education and Advocacy. "NCADP Conferences are astutely planned, strategically relevant and efficiently administered. The quality of the sessions, relevance of the content, and networking opportunities are unparalleled."

Lisa Cisneros, Executive Director of Coloradans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty says, "Through NCADP, I have had the opportunity to meet many people from diverse backgrounds who share the same goals as our organization."

"I've been to every one of NCADP's Annual Conferences since 1991, and I always look forward to the mix of new folks with seasoned movement veterans," said Abe Bonowitz, NCADP's Director of Affiliate Support. "Having the time to catch up with old friends and make new ones is invigorating and inspiring, as is spending time with those most closely affected by the death penalty—families of murder victims, families of the condemned, and exonerated death row prisoners."

The 2011 Conference Plenary Sessions feature renowned keynote speaker Bryan Stevenson, Executive Director of Equal Justice Initiative. Other plenary speakers include Karen Narasaki, President and Executive Director of the Asian American Justice Center and Vice Chair of the Executive Committee of the Leadership Conference on Civil

*Continued on Page 5*



Vicki Schieber,  
Abolitionist of the Year



Sister Helen Prejean,  
Lifetime Achievement  
Award



Bill Mefford,  
Lighting the Torch of  
Conscience Award



Plenary Session Keynote  
Speaker Bryan Stevenson



## A Message from Diann Rust-Tierney

Another weather report from Washington, DC:

One morning this past summer, I awoke to torrents of rain, thunder, violent winds and hail. As I left for work, a gigantic tree that stretched across the road stopped me in my tracks, with the business end covering my driveway. My car was crushed under a mass of branches. Wires from a utility pole blanketed my front yard, blocking the entrance to my house.

My office reminded me of a long-scheduled conference call with participants in our new Torch Bearers' program, which offers supporters opportunities to make monthly gifts to NCADP. This was an important call; using my cell phone was not an option. I negotiated fallen trees and wires to arrive five minutes before the call.

This was also the weekend for ALTI, our Abolitionist Leadership Training Institute orientation program for new Affiliate leadership.

I adjusted to ducking beneath wires and dressing in the dark for the two days my electrical power was out. The problem of my totaled car stayed buried under the tree—more than I could handle with colleagues arriving for ALTI and last minute details needing my attention.

Fortunately, I have great neighbors. They attacked that tree with a chainsaw and an army of hands. Recognizing that I was overwhelmed with no idea of where to start, and wrestling with the branches and leaves, they got me going.

As is the case with my other weather reports, I see parallels to our work.

When the tragedy of murder occurs, we try to pretend that we can contain the profound loss and damage by relying on the old and familiar death penalty that has been with us for more than 30 years—it's business as usual to roll it out in response to a tragedy.

As exemplified by my neighbors, NCADP seeks to confront and resolve an overwhelming problem. Homicide is a devastating event. The trauma tears at the fabric of families and communities. We can try to minimize the trauma and contain it by pretending that years of routines we've used – even failed

routines – will protect us. Or, we can look with fresh eyes, and with the hearts of good neighbors, pitch in to support families and communities as we find a new and better way.

We're always seeking new and better ways in our work, as illustrated in this issue of *Lifelines*. Our cover story tells you about our Annual Conference. And we showcase our ALTI training and its up-and-coming leaders.

I'm especially excited as we develop our plans for the Conference.

*Training for the Long Run: Building Momentum for Repeal* recognizes the importance of building and working with the community of neighbors necessary to bring an end to capital punishment. Ending the death penalty is not a niche issue or special interest. Capital punishment will not be abolished in a vacuum. If we are to succeed it will be because those opposed to or ready to abandon capital punishment have built broad alliances that focus on supporting families and communities in preventing and responding to violence and homicide.

But to build meaningful partnerships and alliances, you have to broaden your perspective to understand the priorities of those in the wider community. So Conference participants will hear from and have an opportunity to dialogue with nationally recognized leaders and experts such as Karen Narasaki, President and Executive Director of the Asian American Justice Center and Vice Chair of the Executive Committee of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; Gary Flowers, the Executive Director of the Black Leadership Forum; Christina Swarns of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and Barry Lynn of Americans for Separation of Church and State.

Bryan Stevenson, the Executive Director of Equal Justice Initiative will keynote the gathering, offering his reflections on EJI's report documenting the systematic exclusion of people of color from jury pools and the broader implications of those findings.

We will explore opportunities for expanding alliances with African American youth and historically black colleges—Dr. Walter Kimbrough, President of Philander Smith College will discuss his vision of incorporating social justice advocacy into the mission of educational institutions and opportunities for partnerships. Wayne McKenzie, Director of the Program on Prosecution and Racial Justice at the Vera Institute will speak about the experience of prosecutors of color and opportunities

for finding common ground with these law enforcement officials. And, we'll continue to explore the emerging alliances in the anti-death penalty movement with political and religious conservatives.

When we see our role as bringing more justice to communities, to families harmed by homicide and violence as well as justice and fairness into the system that holds people accountable for the harm they do, we find that we have many allies and few opponents.

When we literally, see the forest and not just the death penalty tree (sorry I couldn't resist) as the focus of our efforts, we will indeed have many hands, arms and legs to speed us on our way to abolition—the momentum that we need to win.

So join us in Chicago—this year's event promises to be better than ever. We've added a new "Open Space Track" for self-guided learning, and intensive presentations on grassroots organizing and strategic communications. Our Awards Dinner will honor this year's Abolitionist of the Year, Vicki Schieber, Lighting the Torch of Conscience Award recipient Bill Mefford for the United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society; Outstanding Legal Service Award recipients Andrea Lyon, Thomas P. Sullivan and David Bradford, and Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient Sister Helen Prejean.

We're planning a post-dinner dance party and a surprise guest to join us! It all wraps up on Sunday with a spirited interfaith, inclusive and welcoming Service for Grace to send everyone home with the energy and commitment we need to win--and much more in between.

Peace,



Diann Rust-Tierney

## NCADP Lifelines

*NCADP Lifelines* is published by the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the nation's oldest organization devoted exclusively to abolishing capital punishment. Founded in 1976, NCADP unifies a network of more than 100 Affiliate organizations, dedicated advocates and volunteers, and prominent national human and civil rights organizations in the fight to end the death penalty in the United States.

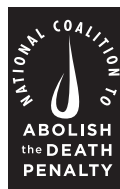
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Editor: Paul Ruffins

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National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty  
1705 DeSales Street, NW, Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-331-4090  
Fax: 202-331-4099

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## Q&A With Curt Crum



NCADP Director Curt Crum is based in Fort Worth, Texas. He is a criminal defense attorney, the Vice Chair of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty Board of Directors, and a member of its Executive Committee. Curt is also a Group Coordinator for the Tarrant County Chapter of Amnesty International and a member of the Texas Bar Association, the Tarrant County Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, and the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association.

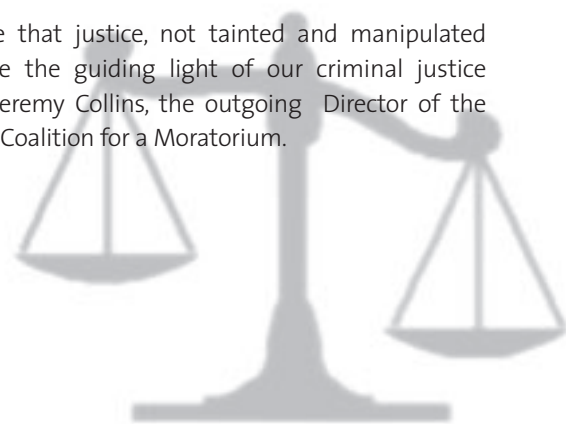
### RECENT DEATH PENALTY NEWS

## North Carolina Groups Call for Further Probes of SBI

North Carolina abolitionists and civil rights activists, including representatives of the NAACP, People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, ACLU of North Carolina, and North Carolina Coalition for a Moratorium, are calling for further investigation into charges of the State Bureau of Investigation's lab staff's flawed evidence gathering, falsifying evidence and general misconduct. An audit of the agency and a series of *Raleigh News & Observer* articles revealed, among other things, that the agency often interpreted evidence to benefit prosecutors and withheld key evidence from defense attorneys.

The organizations want an investigation into each of the 159 death row prisoners' cases, further study of evidence in pending capital cases, and an exploration into all death row cases since the crime lab's formation. In addition, there is a broad call for commutation of those sentences to life in prison, and various calls for abolition, moratorium, or the suspension of death sentences.

"It is our hope that justice, not tainted and manipulated science, will be the guiding light of our criminal justice system," said Jeremy Collins, the outgoing Director of the North Carolina Coalition for a Moratorium.



**Lifelines:** What brought you into this movement?

**Curt:** I joined Amnesty International after hearing about African women subjected to sexual atrocities. Amnesty International sponsored Rick Halperin's talk, "Death Penalty 101," where I learned that the death penalty is a 'crapshoot,' not something reserved for the worst of the worst. I was working as an assistant prosecutor, and I saw how easy it was to frame an innocent person. I also read the book by Kirk Bloodworth, *Bloodworth: The True Story of the First Death Row Inmate Exonerated by DNA*.

**Lifelines:** What makes abolition a personal priority for you?

**Curt:** Innocence is a very big issue for me. I don't believe in the death penalty for the guilty, and it's just horrible to consider an innocent person being condemned to death row. I've had pen pals there, and wondered what it's like to be locked in a 6' x 6' cell day after day, knowing the only way it will ever end is with your death. They will never feel the grass under their feet or the wind in the trees.

Death row is completely different from general prison life. You're in solitary; your only interaction is with the guards. A pen pal wrote that the lack of physical contact is excruciating. The only time she was ever touched by another human being was when the guards would handcuff her.

## Yes – I want to help NCADP end the death penalty forever!

I have enclosed my gift to the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. *All contributions are 100% tax deductible.*

\$1000     \$500     \$250     \$100     \$50     \$35     Other \_\_\_\_\_

Sign me up to be a monthly donor (Torch Bearer) at the amount indicated above:

**(A reply envelope is enclosed in Lifelines as a courtesy to our supporters)**

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You can also donate by going to [ncadp.org](http://ncadp.org).

## Annual Conference *From Page 1*

and Human Rights; Gary Flowers, Executive Director and CEO of the Black Leadership Forum; Christina Swarns, Director of the Criminal Justice Project of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Other speakers include Dr. Walter Kimbrough, President of Philander Smith College and Wayne McKenzie, Director of the Program on Prosecution and Racial Justice, Vera Institute of Justice.

Our celebratory Annual Awards Dinner on January 15 will be the crowning event of the Conference. The awardees are: Vicki Schieber, Abolitionist of the Year; Sister Helen Prejean, Lifetime Achievement Award; Bill Mefford for the United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, Lighting the Torch of Conscience; Andrea Lyon, Thomas J. Sullivan, David Bradford, Outstanding Legal Service Awards; and others who have made 2010 an important year for the repeal movement.

For students, volunteers, new board members and all others interested in gaining a foundational understanding of the death penalty, we will offer a Death Penalty Policy Basics track filled with information and skills building workshops.

For Affiliate staff, organizers, and communication point-persons, we offer a Strategic Organizing or Communication mini-track. Each will be a five-hour, intensive skills training on Friday, January 14.

Throughout the Conference, a Rachel's Fund track, comprised of a series of workshops and a plenary session, will focus on understanding and working with families of murder victims, the justice system, and victims' needs.

For seasoned advocates who attend the Conference for networking and innovative ideas, we offer two Open Space sessions. The "Open Space" concept assumes exceptional things happen when advocates who feel strongly about the death penalty have the opportunity to increase their involvement in ending capital punishment. Participants will focus their attention on finding solutions to advocacy or policy challenges they face. Discussions of these issues will take place in self-selected small groups. Notes generated from these sessions will shape and inform future initiatives.

Acknowledging that learning which takes place outside the meeting rooms can be as valuable as the learning inside them, we are once again providing fantastic networking opportunities at the Conference, including: Activist Activity Center, NCADP Affiliate Leadership Pre-conference Meeting; an Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty Action (hopefully a bill signing!); Early Morning Yoga; First Time Attendees' Orientation; a local reception; and other fun event options.

## Books From the Death Penalty Library

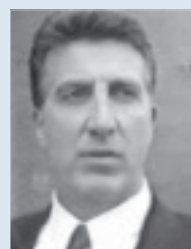


*Too Politically Sensitive*

By Michale Callahan

Land of Lincoln Press, Champaign, Illinois, 2009

Reviewed by Paul Ruffins



Michale Callahan

"Too Politically Sensitive" is a chilling case study of how official corruption and greed can send innocent people to death row. It reads like a detective novel, because author Michale Callahan is a former police officer.

In July 1986, the bodies of newlyweds Dyke and Karen Rhoads were found in the smoking ruins of their burned Paris, Illinois home. Prior to her murder, Karen had told relatives she was frightened because her boss, who made large campaign contributions to the Governor, had noticed her watching him load a car with a large amount of cash and a machine gun. On the night of the killings, neighbors saw two strangers with Florida plates watching the home. A filling station had sold the strangers containers of gasoline.

Randy Steidl and Herbert Whitlock's names came up when the town's rumor mill was stoked by a large reward offered by Karen's boss. The local police bribed and threatened an alcoholic mental patient, and a drug addict, into perjuring themselves and implicating Steidl and Whitlock. Police, who described the murders as a drug deal gone badly, framed even the victims.

Nearly 14 years later, amid questions raised by the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project and an impending segment on CBS News' "48 Hours," Callahan was assigned to review the case. He uncovered police and prosecutorial misconduct, intimidation, and the deliberate withholding of evidence favorable to the defense, among other things. Callahan and his immediate supervisor were warned to abandon the investigation, because it was "too politically sensitive."

Callahan ignored the warnings, and his work paid off. Whitlock was exonerated and released from prison in 2008 after 21 years. Steidl was exonerated in 2004 after serving 17 years in prison, including 12 on death row. He is currently the Secretary of Witness to Innocence's Board of Directors.



# ALTI III Training Focuses on Movement Newcomers

This year's Abolitionist Leadership Training Institute, held in Arlington, Virginia, was designed to reach newer abolitionists who have come into the movement with a variety of activist experiences and backgrounds in other social justice organizations. During a highly concentrated weekend in mid-August, 16 of the newcomers, many of whom came from different movements, shared best practice information about membership building, organizing, fundraising and communications with veteran abolition activists and each other.

Participants included new executive directors of NCADP Affiliates, new board chairpersons, and, in the case of several state and national Affiliates, new organizing staff.

Attendees came from Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia and Washington. The program focused on strategy and tactics. Participants learned how to leverage social and traditional media, build grassroots membership, raise funds from foundations, individual contributors and fundraising events, and how to anticipate and surmount challenges to the movement's efforts to repeal capital punishment in the states that implement it.

Evaluating ALTI III, many participants said they appreciated being assigned to small groups with similar circumstances and challenges. They discussed issues such as building organizational capacity and managing various tasks with limited or no material and human resources.

"I feel more connected to the movement and aware of the resources available," said Megan Jackson, board chair of the Washington Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. "After ALTI, I now have a vision of where we are nationally and where Washington is, and a few clear next steps that are tangible and direct. This was so helpful and personally meaningful – I feel a bit isolated sometimes, and this brought to life a community I have not been using."

Several participants reported they enjoyed discussing their work with their peers, as well as with movement veterans. Some of them said they realized in talking to abolitionists from other states how much legislative, moratorium and study commission campaigns

affect movements in neighboring or nearby states.

"I'm impressed with the amount you guys covered in the time we had together," said Scott Bass, an organizer with Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation. "I feel much better equipped to assist MVFR's work in North Carolina and to help other states' campaigns."



**"I feel more connected to the movement and aware of the resources available. . . After ALTI, I now have a vision of where we are nationally and where Washington is, and a few clear next steps that are tangible and direct."**

**—Megan Jackson,  
Washington**

ALTI III participants also noted they valued hearing more about NCADP's Rachel's Fund program. They said the presentation given by Program Director Mary Achilles increased their understanding of the importance of strengthening ties between the families of murder victims, families of death row prisoners and the abolition movement.

"ALTI helped me know that our campaign is on track and our tactics are right," said Denver Henderson, an organizer with the Montana Abolition Coalition. "The resource manual is hugely helpful, and being the new guy in Montana, I feel more caught up when I realize that my colleagues received the same great training. You guys did a fantastic job!"

"Through NCADP, I have had the opportunity to meet many people from diverse backgrounds who share the same goals as our organization," Henderson said.



**Travis Shulze (center) of South Dakotans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty asks a question as Denver Henderson (left) of the Montana Action Coalition and Karen Clifton of the Catholic Mobilizing Network listen.**

"I enjoy meeting Affiliates' representatives during ALTI trainings," says Margaret Summers, NCADP's Communications Director. "As they detail their experiences, I learn more about the fundraising, organizing and news media challenges they confront daily in working to end capital punishment in their respective states. Listening to them helps me determine what kinds of communications training will enhance and strengthen their work."

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## Capital Quotes



*“No legal system is perfect. Human beings make mistakes. That is one reason we accept the notion that occasionally the guilty will go free and the innocent will be convicted. But I do not believe anyone accepts the notion that it is all right for a person to be wrongfully executed.*

*So with the most respected judicial system in the world, how can we willingly embrace a sentence which cannot be reversed after it is imposed, and how can we continue to believe that it is morally acceptable for the state to take a human life?”*

JOSEPH P. NADEAU  
RETIRED NEW HAMPSHIRE SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

*“I suggest that the death penalty is the last frontier of this historical movement that strongly accents the intrinsic value of every human person. At least for*

*the past four centuries, humanity has lifted women, slaves and civilians trapped in war zones from the class of ‘human objects’ to the protected status of human beings who enjoy the inviolable right to life. The same right to life must now be extended to men and women convicted of capital crimes.”*

BISHOP FRANCIS CHRISTIAN, AUXILIARY BISHOP,  
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

*“100 Years from now, the idea that a civilized free society strapped down those it found unfit to live and killed them either with electricity or lethal drugs will seem unbelievable. Particularly as more and more evidence emerges that the death penalty was often imposed unfairly...and that many people were executed who were actually not guilty, it will become a black mark on our history.”*

—FROM A READER’S RESPONSE TO A WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE ON WHAT FUTURE GENERATIONS MIGHT CONDEMN AMERICANS FOR TODAY

## NCADP Names New Texas State Campaign Coordinator

Anita Grabowski has been named NCADP’s Texas State Campaign Coordinator, a two-year post. Based in Austin, Anita will work as an organizer and coordinate closely with Kristin Houlé, executive director at the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, an NCADP Affiliate.

Anita will support the efforts of the Texas Coalition in building a stronger statewide network of policy advocates and activists as they work to end capital punishment. The program includes building stronger organizational capacity through coalition building, effective communications, membership development and fundraising.

“Anita’s appointment demonstrates the continuing growth of the campaign to end the death penalty as advocates from other issue areas bring new experiences and strategies to our work,” said Sachin Chheda, NCADP Deputy Director. “At NCADP we embrace the opportunity to mesh these backgrounds with those of our long-time veterans. Through this partnership, we are stronger and more effective.”

In other positions Anita Grabowski was an organizer at the Center for Community Change where she worked with grassroots organizing groups to strengthen local efforts and build collaborative federal policy campaigns. She also co-founded the Mississippi Poultry Workers Center and consulted on community-union organizing drives throughout the South.

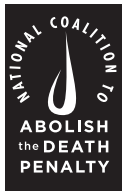


Anita Grabowski

She holds a master’s degree in Latin American studies and anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin and a bachelor’s in political science and Latin American studies from New York University. Anita is fluent in Spanish and will assist the Texas Coalition and NCADP with outreach to the Spanish-speaking community.

In addition to her organizing work, she has partnered with her husband, film director John Fiege on several films, including “Mississippi Chicken,” a documentary about the lives and struggles of Latin American immigrants recruited to work in that state’s poultry processing plants. The film was nominated for a Gotham Award in 2007.

Anita can be reached at Anita@ncadp.org; telephone 512-496-6695.



**NATIONAL COALITION TO  
ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY**  
1705 DeSales Street, NW, Fifth Floor  
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**Save The Date!**  
**Attend NCADP's Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois!**  
**January 13 – 16, 2011**  
**The Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel**

*Editor's Note: Thousands of individuals and organizations provide us with the vital financial support which enables us to fight the death penalty. With this issue of Lifelines, we introduce Why I Give to NCADP, recognizing an individual who has been a long-time donor.*

**Why I Give to NCADP**

BY STEPHEN ROHDE

Soon after Diann Rust-Tierney became Executive Director of NCADP, I accompanied my annual contribution with a note of encouragement saying "I'm so proud and grateful for the work you do day-in-and-day-out to end the death penalty. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." Diann tells me she keeps it pinned up next to her desk.

That note says it all. Next to the Quakers, NCADP, after almost 35 years in the trenches, is the nation's oldest organization dedicated to abolishing the death penalty. For as long as I've fought against capital punishment, working through the ACLU and Death Penalty Focus, I've looked to NCADP as a backbone of this movement, because I've observed its wise leadership, innovative training, concise and illuminating publications and effective lobbying.

When I contribute to NCADP, I know that my support will go directly into helping NCADP's 100 Affiliates around the country expand their capacities to educate local communities about the scourge of the death penalty. NCADP has proven to be adept at building coalitions among families of murder victims, political, religious, civil and racial justice organizations, defense lawyers and law enforcement officials.



Stephen Rohde

As abolitionists continue to contribute to their local and statewide groups, I would encourage them to support the powerful national voice of NCADP, which is playing such a pivotal role in this campaign. If everyone who believes that state killing is wrong and must be abolished sent NCADP at least \$1.00 a day, we could end this abomination in our lifetimes.

And include a note of encouragement from time to time.

*Stephen Rohde is a constitutional lawyer, Chair of the ACLU Foundation of Southern California and a Vice President of Death Penalty Focus. He lives in Los Angeles and is the author of American Words of Freedom and Freedom of Assembly.*