

ALABAMA ATTORNEY GENERAL TROY KING



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National Victims' Rights Week Observed Across Alabama

By Pat Jones, VOCAL

National Victims' Rights Week was observed April 13-19, 2008, across Alabama. It is a time set by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, for all Americans to learn about victimization, reflect on the cost of crime to our society, and promote laws, policies, and programs to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The week's theme, "Justice for Victims. Justice for All." envisions a strengthened national commitment to the nearly 23 million Americans harmed by crime each year. In Alabama, over 850 people lost their lives to murder and vehicular homicide. National Crime Victims' Rights Week is about honoring the victim. From the moment a crime happens, it seems that everything centers around the defendant and the victim gets lost. This is one week out of the year that the victim takes center stage and we honor them. Candlelight vigils were held across the state during the week. Vigils were held in Dothan, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, and Florence. The vigils are sponsored by VOCAL (Victims Of Crime And Leniency) and are supported by the local District Attorneys in the areas. Attorney General Troy

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From the Desk of Troy King

It is our honor to stand up for you. It is our privilege to stand beside you. We cannot undo the crime done to you, but you are never alone.

- Troy King

Crime Victims Rights Week 2008 is now over. As I have traveled our state, it has been deeply gratifying to spend time with hundreds of victims and survivors all across Alabama. With each stop, I have been reminded that some wounds never heal, some hurts never stop, sometimes there is never closure. As I have stood with you, you have shown me pictures of those you loved the most, you have relayed to me stories of grave injustice, and you have inspired me to never stop being your voice.

While I cannot promise you that our state will suddenly be safe, while I cannot guarantee you that there will be no more victims, I can reassure that, so long as there are victims, I will stand

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THE ALABAMA CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM HAS WORKED SO FAR FOR THE COPELAND FAMILY.

BY : WILLIAM J. COPELAND P.E. , COLONEL, USAF (RET)

The second parole hearing for William Lee Slagle AIS 161828 (and former Samford University Debate Coach), serving a life sentence for the murder of Rex Copeland (Samford Debate Student), was held April 30, 2008, and parole was denied and extended until 2012. The Copeland family will be forever grateful to the Board of Pardons and Paroles, Alabama Attorney General Troy King, Shelby County District Attorney Robby Owens, Sheriffs of Shelby and Jefferson counties, VOCAL, and many others across this state that supported the denial of this parole.

On September 21, 1989, William Lee Slagle came to our son's apartment at about 2:00 A.M. and stabbed our son 12 times and left him dead. The Shelby County Corner described the apartment saying it was like the walls and ceiling had been painted with blood. During the trial the District Attorney indicated how this was a total overkill. Within a few days after the murder Slagle fled and stayed on the run for over six months. Slagle wrote letters to the Shelby County Sheriff and others admitting he killed Rex Copeland and said he was going to commit suicide but he did not. National TV coverage on shows like "A Current Affair and Unsolved Mysteries" got Slagle's picture out to the public. The FBI started checking Slagle's former associates in Georgia and Texas frequently and Slagle finally turned himself into the Shelby County Sheriff and was tried and convicted of intentional murder. On March 8, 1991, he was sentenced to serve the remainder of his life in prison. At the time the Copeland family did not understand that in Alabama a life sentence means Slagle will be considered for parole about every five years. So every five years we present our case for denial of parole and his lawyer presents Slagle's case for granting parole. So far we have prevailed but truth in sentencing law reforms are badly needed to preclude victims' families from having to suffer through parole hearings every five years. As a victim I feel a life sentence for intentional murder should be served in full and no parole considered for at least 50 years. Only if sentences are required to be served fully will we see that this punishment serves to deter and reduce future murders. The only deterrence to future murders is the fear of unacceptable punishment. Serving five, ten, or even 20 years is not an adequate deterrence to a potential murder, but 50 years to life should deter those that can be deterred. We should also strive to expedite capital punishment executions as a deterrent to those planning murder. Delaying executions 15 to 20 years does nothing to deter other murders from killing innocent people. But in our case, justice is being served so long as the parole board keeps Slagle behind bars where he belongs for the rest of his life.

Slagle was the debate coach at Samford University and violated the sacred trust every parent places in teachers across this great nation every day. Rex's mother was a teacher and high school librarian and his grandmother was an elementary



teacher for over 40 years. The Copeland family understands that 99.9 percent of school teachers are kind and caring teachers who have the interest of their students before all else. Murdering students because they are not working on their debate program 24 hours per day is a hideous act that demands as a minimum a life sentence and that sentence be served in full. Denying parole to Slagle has signaled other potential murders teaching our sons and daughters across the country that this sort of dastardly act will not be tolerated and has helped ensure that the special trust we must place in all teachers is preserved. I can think of no better deterrence to crime than requiring the full sentence be served. Giving a person like Slagle parole will destroy the very fabric of law and order this great nation is built upon.

Rex was killed at the young age of 20, but in life and death made Alabama proud in all that he did. As a young boy Rex loved playing soccer with his friends at Huffman YMCA and played in the Huffman HS Band. Rex was an outstanding debater at Huffman High School in Birmingham and became a well-known collegiate debater while attending Samford University. As a freshman he and his partner won enough debates to be asked to the National Debate Tournament (NDT), which does not happen to most debaters, not to mention freshmen. He and his partner did well for freshmen at the NDT and impressed other College Debate Coaches such as Harvard and the University of Michigan. In the summer after his first year of college, 1988, Rex worked on the University of Michigan staff teaching debate to high school students. He so impressed the people of Michigan that after he was killed they set up five "Copeland Scholarships" that are still going strong today and for the foreseeable future. Family and friends of Rex also set up two scholarships at Samford University and one joint scholarship at Auburn University (Machemehl, Neville and Copeland Scholarship). Other debate students and coaches at schools throughout the nation such as Harvard, Dartmouth, Emory, Southern California, etc., respected and liked Rex. He was seen as a respected foe and valued friend. He was a member of Sigma Chi fraternity and well liked by the students at Samford University. Rex loved life and enjoyed working and socializing with people. He spent most but not all his time studying and this allowed Rex to keep his charisma that could excite an audience small or large. He could take either side of an issue and win in a debate or discussion. Rex was an outstanding public speaker. He used words to win his battles, not knives or guns or fists. He was studying Pre-Law and had plans to run for public office after college. Only God knows what Rex would have become had he lived a full life: perhaps a congressman, senator, or governor.

After Rex was killed one of the speakers at the next National Debate Tournament Banquet recommended an award be

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From the Desk of Troy King

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beside you and light another candle, lift another prayer, and defend another sentence from being undone in an appellate court or in a parole hearing. No, I cannot undo the horrors done to you, but I can assure that you never again will have to face the system alone. I can work tirelessly to be sure that our laws are constantly being strengthened to better and more appropriately punish those who break them. I can be a voice, wherever I go. No, I cannot ensure that there will be no more victims, but, together, I pray we will find strength to face tomorrow for those already victimized and, through our efforts, I pray we can reduce the number of victims who will come in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

We do not hold vigils for the dead, but for the living. As I have reflected on this year's memorials, I have thought of each of you as I met, or saw you again and the words of an old poem:

An old man, going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast, and deep, and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned, when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.
"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim, near,



"You are wasting strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the evening day;
You never again must pass this way;
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide;
Why build you a bridge at the eventide?"
The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There follows after me today,
A youth, whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm, that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him."

Yes, to be sure, those I met with this week gather to find comfort in the company of the only ones who can understand, those who have walked in their shoes, but they can also gather with a high and noble underlying purpose - they gather to preserve the memory of someone they loved, and they gather to renew a vow to do all in their power to ensure that those who come after them find the road just a little easier to travel. This week, I have been honored to spend my time in the company of Alabama's finest and most selfless bridge builders and that is an honor I do not take for granted. May God grant you peace, comfort, and consolation today and everyday.

National Victims' Rights Week continued from page 1

King graciously accepted our invitation to be keynote speaker at most of the vigils for the past four years. He has stood by the victims of crime in this state.

VOCAL's Angel House also sponsored the Governor's Conference on Tuesday, April 15th. The conference is a training session for law enforcement and a luncheon to honor those who have excelled in going the extra mile for victims of crime. Each VOCAL Chapter plans their own observance during the week. Candles may be lit, balloons released, and long stem roses given to the family of a loved one lost to murder. A special tribute to victims is presented with a slide show featuring victims who have been murdered. While nothing can replace the senseless loss of a loved one at the hands of a criminal, the surrounding by others who can have empathy for the situation is comforting.

COLD CASE CORNER

The age of a case is no longer a bar to the efforts to obtain justice.

If you are aware of an old or cold case that you would like to have considered for acceptance into this Unit, contact your local law enforcement agency and ask them to review the case for its appropriateness for referral to this Unit. Once the required referral has been received, it will be presented to the Cold Case Review Committee of the Attorney General's Office. This committee will determine whether the case meets the established criteria for acceptance into the Cold Case Unit. We look forward to bringing important resources to bear in the quest for justice.



JETTIS HOLIFIELD (PRICHARD ALABAMA)

In May 2007, the Office of the Alabama Attorney General, received a request for assistance from Mrs. Melinda Holifield, regarding the homicide of her son, Jettis Holifield, which occurred on September 12, 2000, in Prichard, Alabama.

On September 12, 2000, at approximately 9:27 p.m., Jettis Holifield was shot once in the back of his neck as he attempted to flee from an armed assailant riding a bicycle. According to witnesses' accounts, Holifield was pumping gas into his vehicle at the Petro gas station located at 79 Martin Luther King Avenue in Prichard, Alabama, when an unknown assailant wearing a ski mask and riding a bicycle began shooting at Holifield. Holifield ran south into a vacant lot adjacent to the gas station when one of the bullets struck him in his neck. According to the autopsy report prepared by the Department of Forensic Sciences, this gunshot wound caused the death of Holifield.

The case had gone cold after the lead detective who conducted the initial investigation left the Prichard Police Department. To further complicate the progress of this investigation, there had been a change in the Prichard Police

Department's administration after the murder of Holifield. In their defense, the new administration was unfamiliar with the Holifield case. After Mrs. Holifield's request, special agents assigned to the Attorney General's newly formed Cold Case Unit met with Prichard Police Chief Lawrence Battiste and offered their assistance.

In a cooperative effort between the Prichard Police Department and the Alabama Attorney General's Cold Case Unit, agents began to make progress in the investigation. Eventually, an eyewitness was located and was able to positively identify the individual that shot Jettis Holifield. Agents were also able to obtain a DNA sample from the suspect which was matched to evidence that was collected the night of the shooting by the Prichard Police Department. Additional witnesses were also located who provided invaluable information towards the resolution of this case.

In March 2008, the investigation was presented to the Mobile County grand jury for their consideration. The grand jury returned a true bill of indictment against Tarrance Shavers, charging him with the murder of Jettis Holifield. In April 2008, Shavers was arrested and is currently in the Mobile County Jail awaiting trial.

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established in Rex Copeland's name. All those that had known Rex quickly supported this suggestion. With the help of Samford University and many others, and the approval of the NDT Trustees and NDT National Committee, the Rex Copeland Memorial Award was approved in 1990.

This award is presented annually to the collegiate debate team ranked "Number One" in the First Round, At Large considering all the college debate teams within the United States. Over the years the national debate teams were trying so hard to win this trophy that it was decided in 2000 to start recognizing the top five teams in the nation in addition to just the number one team. Rex would have fully supported this idea of recognizing as many deserving people as possible. To see more about this award, see web site: <http://groups.wfu.edu/NDT/HistoricalLists/copeland.html>. Our son Rex Copeland, like the Tyrannosaurus Rex, no longer roams the earth in life but still lives in the hearts and minds of every college debate student and will through the "Rex Copeland Memorial Award" be remembered forever. Even in death Rex continues to make Alabama proud. On his tomb it is inscribed "He who does his best in his own time lives for all times" Rex indeed did his best in his short 20 years here on earth.

The good people of Shelby County who served as jurors did justice and gave Slagle a life sentence on March 8, 1991. The Alabama Pardon and Parole Board has so far carried out the sentence rendered and William Lee Slagle remains in prison where he belongs. We will strive every five years to keep Slagle in prison where he belongs.

At VOCAL meetings we sometimes hear other victims who have not received what they believe to be justice and feel the system has failed them. To those I can only say keep your chin up and continue to do everything within the law to get justice. Join VOCAL and talk to other victims to see what they did to get justice. Check out your elected representatives and support those that support Victims Rights and do not support those soft on criminals such as murderers. Too many laws unduly protect criminals and too few laws protect the victims from criminal acts. Together, we can make Alabama a safer, better place to live and work. Let's all get started.

Know Your Rights - A Guide to the Victims' Bill of Rights

Part 3

Rights of the Victim Following an Acquittal or a Conviction

If the Victim has completed the notice form with the prosecutor's office, then the prosecuting attorney must provide the Victim with information about the outcome of the defendant's case, whether it be a conviction, an acquittal, or whether charges have been dropped.

Acquittal

If the defendant has been acquitted, or the charges have been dropped, the Victim must be provided with:

- The date the defendant was acquitted of the charges
- The date any charges were dismissed against the defendant
- Information educating the Victim on the effect of a dismissal



Conviction

If the defendant has been convicted of any of the charges against him, the prosecuting attorney must provide the Victim with the following information:

- The date the defendant was convicted as well as the charges for which he was convicted
- The time, place, and date of the sentencing hearing
- The right of the Victim to be present and to be heard at any sentencing proceeding
- The existence and function of a pre-sentence report if one is required in the case
- The name and contact information for the office of the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles which is preparing the pre-sentence report
- The right of the Victim to review a copy of the pre-sentence report
- The right of the Victim to make a statement to the judge and/or jury about the effects the crime(s) has had on the Victim, called a "victim impact statement"
- The right of the defendant to view the pre-sentence report
- The right of the Victim to collect restitution if restitution was granted by the court

The Victim also has the right to submit a written, or make an oral statement to the probation officer about the economic, physical, and emotional effects the crime has had on the Victim and his/her immediate family. The probation officer is required to take this written or oral victim statement into consideration when preparing a pre-sentence report.

Victim's Right to Appoint a Personal Representative

If a Victim is physically or emotionally unable to exercise his/her rights, a Victim has the right to designate a representative to exercise those rights, or have a court of law do the same. If the Victim is a minor or child, the parent may exercise the Victim rights of their child.

In addition, the Attorney General or district attorney may assert any right to which the Victim is entitled.

LINKS & RESOURCES

Office of the Attorney General
State of Alabama
11 South Union Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130
Office: (334) 242-7300
Toll Free: (800) 626-7676
www.go.state.al.us
Email: troyking@go.state.al.us

Attorney General's
Victim Assistance
(800) 626-7676
www.go.state.alabama.gov

Alabama Crime Victims
Compensation Commission
(800) 541-9388
(334) 290-4420
www.acvcc.state.al.us

Victims of Crime and Leniency
(VOCAL)
(800) 239-3219
www.vocalonline.org

Alabama Coalition Against
Domestic Violence
(334) 832-4842
www.acadv.org

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
(800) 635-0722
(334) 277-7722
www.madd.org

Alabama Network of Children's
Advocacy Centers
(334) 834-3468
www.alabamacacs.org

Alabama Coalition Against Rape
(334) 264-0123
www.acar.org

U.S. Supreme Court Upholds The Death Penalty

On April 16th, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively ended its seven-month freeze on the death penalty. In Baze v. Rees, the Court held that Kentucky's use of lethal injection was not cruel and unusual punishment for convicted capital murderers. The Court's 7-2 opinion in favor of Kentucky's lethal injection protocol is good news for Alabama victims.

Most importantly, the seven judges in the majority held that all states with lethal injection protocols "substantially similar" to Kentucky's pass constitutional muster as well. Alabama's three-drug protocol – which has been embroiled in litigation for over three years – is virtually identical to Kentucky's three-drug protocol. Furthermore, the two dissenting judges cited Alabama's new method of assessing the inmate's (un)consciousness as a primary deficiency in Kentucky's plan. Thus, it seems likely that all nine Supreme Court justices would approve of Alabama's method of lethal injection.

All signs point to a resumption in executions in Alabama. Since releasing the Baze opinion, the Supreme Court has lifted and denied stays of execution from death row inmates across the nation, including Alabama. On May 6th, Georgia conducted the nation's first execution in over seven months. Alabama will soon follow. In the past month, the Attorney General has requested execution dates for five death row inmates: Phillip Hallford, Thomas Arthur, Jimmy Dill, Willie McNair, and James Callahan. The State awaits execution orders from the Alabama Supreme Court.



Meet Don Valeska Office of the Attorney General Violent Crimes Division Chief

Why he does it!

"I do what I do because the Violent Crimes Division of the Attorney General's Office is where victims of crime and their families can receive justice. This Office is unique, because based on Attorney General Troy King's directive we can come in and take a case from local prosecutors when they refuse to prosecute. There is no amount of time that passes, by statute, when we cannot take over a case. This division has vigorously prosecuted people in law enforcement that have killed spouses and girlfriends for insurance proceeds. Our division has tried Capital murder cases that are four years old because local District Attorneys would not give the victim's family their time in court." - Don Valeska

This is the division of last resort for victims and their families. Valeska and the victims of these horrible crimes and their families are grateful to the lawyers and staff members of the division who have prosecuted these difficult cases and are responsible for the success of the division. Without them, many murderers would be free.

Valeska moved to Dothan, Alabama after high school. He graduated from the University of Alabama School of Law. He served 2 years active duty in the Army in Vietnam. He has served 28 years in the Army Reserve. In 1975 Valeska was asked to serve as the Chief Assistant District Attorney of Mobile by Charlie Graddick, when Graddick was the District Attorney. When Graddick was elected as Attorney General in 1979, Valeska was invited to join the Attorney General's Office, where he currently serves as the Violent Crimes Division Chief.

Valeska and his brother Doug, who is the District Attorney for Houston and Henry counties, are the only team of brothers who prosecute in the state. Valeska's wife is a retired attorney for the Alabama Forestry Commission. They have a son, Tyler, who is a National Merit Scholar at the University of Alabama.