

To the members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak yesterday on behalf of SB 185. I did not expect to be called for questions after giving my name, so I was caught a bit flat footed and didn't speak as well as I could have. When Rep. Pease-Lopez asked me if I had a personal story to share with the committee, I said that I did not. However, that is not strictly the truth.

Those of you who have served in combat share with me the understanding of what it feels like to take a human life. I have performed over 150 combat missions, and in the course of those missions I was required to kill or be killed. The psychological damage done by that act is immense. It dehumanizes, and takes something away from us. George Orwell famously said, "We sleep safe in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm." I am one of those rough men; I am trained to kill our enemies in combat. Every time an execution is performed in our prison we are forcing corrections officers, who may not be as prepared or as well trained, to pull that trigger. Is vengeance really worth creating another killer?

The opponents of the bill would cite scripture and try to show you how the bible supports capital punishment. I even heard it said in the senate hearing that, "were Jesus here, he would be flipping the switch himself." I consider myself a Christian, and have read and studied my bible and have been unable to find any instance where Jesus performed or even condoned a violent act. In fact, he told his disciples to put their swords away, in the garden, when they drew them in his defense as the Roman soldiers came to take him. The Christian faith is one of peace, and forgiveness and I cannot understand why those who would call themselves Christians would advocate killing anyone, even the worst of us.

There are others who oppose the bill that represent family values organizations. When they testified, however, they spoke as individuals, not on behalf of their groups. That tells me that their organizations do not support their position on this issue. This is not a partisan issue, not an issue that belongs to Democrats or Republicans.

The allegation that this is not a Montana issue does not ring true to me. I am a Montanan; I have raised my children here, fought wild-fires here, and served here. This issue belongs to all of us. It is our responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves, again even the worst of us.

In closing, this is a very great issue, perhaps the most significant issue being considered by the legislature this session. I believe that it is too weighty to be decided by only twenty members of the house. I would request that even if you do not support the bill, allow it to pass from committee and be debated on the house floor. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter

Very Respectfully,



SSG F. James Kearns

8555 N. Montana
Helena, MT
59602