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# Death penalty under Wharton's radar

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## EVENTS - NOVEMBER 12, 2003

### Death penalty under Wharton's radar

It was a day for the history books, Jan. 31, 2000, the day that Illinois Gov. George Ryan declared a moratorium on the death penalty and established a commission to review the capital punishment system in his state. "Until I can be sure, with moral certainty, that no innocent man or woman is facing a lethal injection, no one will meet that fate," Ryan said.

Since Illinois reinstated the death penalty in 1977, 13 inmates on death row have been cleared of charges.

On Thursday, Nov. 13, at 6 p.m., former Gov. Ryan will debate the death penalty with Colorado Gov. Bill Owens at Michigan State University's Wharton Center. The event is part of a "World View" lecture series, which will bring world leaders to mid-Michigan, honoring 150 years of higher learning at the university.

The United States is one of the last large, economically developed countries that enforces the death penalty. Other countries that still execute people include the non-allied governments of Iraq, Iran and North Korea, as well as U.S. allies, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Ryan set up a commission to study the state's capital-punishment system, which last year produced a report recommending that the death penalty not be restored until 85 reforms were made in the system. These include reducing the number of capital crimes, exempting the mentally handicapped, and sparing anyone whose guilt was determined primarily from testimony by an accomplice, prison informant or single eyewitness.

The second speaker, Owens, has also implemented capital punishment reforms in his state. In 2002 he announced legislation that would return Colorado's death penalty sentencing to a unanimous jury decision. "Victim's families need certainty that justice will be served in Colorado. This is a strong agreement that will ensure that our death penalty sentencing laws will pass constitutional muster, and I look forward to quick passage of this measure," Owens said.

The lecture will take place in Wharton Center's Great Hall. Admission is \$20. Call 432-2000.

- by Daniel Sturm

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