



Publications

CADP Honors Bud Welch as Abolitionist of the Year

-- By [Philip Tobias](#)

Bud Welch was honored with the "Abolitionist of the Year" award, presented at the third annual Coloradans Against the Death Penalty (CADP) dinner. Welch lost his daughter, Julie, in the Oklahoma City bombing. Despite that, Welch has been an outspoken opponent of the death penalty.

The awards dinner was held Thursday, January 24, 2002, at the Montview Presbyterian Church in Denver. A private reception with Welch preceded the dinner. Reception proceeds benefit CADP's abolition lobbying efforts in the Colorado General Assembly.

The evening's events were well attended, with extra seating required for the overflow dinner crowd. Attendees included politicians, lawyers, clergy, and concerned citizens of all ages. All opposed to the death penalty. Leading human rights and civil liberties organizations were also well represented.

Denise Madden, CADP President, was the evening's emcee. After acknowledging the CADP board members in attendance, she introduced the keynote speaker, Michael Radelet.

Radelet, formerly the chair of the University of Florida sociology department, is now with the University of Colorado's sociology department. Radelet has studied capital punishment for more than 20 years. He has discovered numerous cases, throughout the country, in which innocent people were executed.

Radelet's keynote address interwove two themes. He counted down the many reasons for optimism among death penalty opponents. Radelet cited trends and studies, which show public support for executions is declining. Especially when a clear alternative of sure imprisonment is presented. Radelet predicted the end of executions "in our lifetime." His other theme was the history of executions in Colorado. While describing the ghoulissh spectacle of early public executions, he also detailed how often executions were botched. Ropes and other apparatus frequently failed, inflicting additional slow suffering on the condemned.

State Senator Penfield Tate (D), followed Radelet on the podium. Tate jokingly welcomed attendees to his own District 33, and hoped they "would enjoy their visit." He also mentioned a new bill in the Colorado General Assembly, which he suggested was designed solely to "kill more people." The bill he referred to is SB02-077, the Single Judge Death Sentence bill introduced by vocal death-penalty proponent Senator Ken Chlouber (R-District 4). The bill was introduced in the Senate on January 11, 2002, and assigned to the Judiciary committee. Tate then introduced the man of the night, [Bud Welch](#).

Welch has testified before the U.S. Congress, many State Senate and House Judiciary Committees, made numerous radio and TV appearances, and met frequently with the father of [Timothy McVeigh](#).

Welch has also been honored with numerous awards. Awards include the "Abolitionist of the Year Award" in 1998 by the Oklahoma Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty; the "Felton Humanitarian Award" from the Death Penalty Focus of California; the "Spirit of Compassion Award" of the Prison Action Committee in Buffalo, New York; and the ACLU Oklahoma Foundation "Anti-Death Penalty/Prison Project Award." In 1999 Mr. Welch received the "Abolitionist of the Year Award" from the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Now it was CADP's turn to honor Welch.

This night, Welch touched the large crowd with tender, often-humorous tales of Julie, whose body was discovered some days after the bombing. He told of her growing up, and taking interest in people of all nationalities. And he told of a Colorado connection. The family lived in Colorado Springs years ago. Years later, Julie was accepted by the University of Colorado in Boulder, though a scholarship persuaded her to study elsewhere. One funny story involved "Dambear," a favorite stuffed animal. To escape embarrassment, this childhood toy was eventually smuggled into Julie's college dorm, wrapped in a towel. Don't let the college boys see it.

Welch spoke of the devastation following Julie's death. The tragedy turned the service-station owner's life upside down. It drove him to drink heavily. It drove him to reexamine his deepest feelings, including his lifelong opposition to the death penalty. He finally realized that hatred and revenge were

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Our Mission

The mission of Coloradans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CADP) is to make our justice system more effective by establishing smart alternatives that abolish capital punishment. CADP will do this through religious, educational, advocacy, and victims rights efforts.

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not the answer.

Hatred and revenge were, on the contrary, the cause of Welch's pain. It was hatred over the 1993 government massacre in Waco, Texas, which resulted in Timothy McVeigh's 1995 Oklahoma City bombing revenge.

Rather than seeking revenge, Welch sought reconciliation. He told the attentive audience about meeting the father and sister of Timothy McVeigh. He sat at their kitchen table, sneaking glances at a high-school portrait of Tim. Rather than being divided by hatred, the three were joined in a common bond of humanity. And shared loss. The meeting ended in tearful hugs.

After the touching stories, and much "bragging on" his dear daughter, Welch finished by talking briefly about his recent trip to Russia. While there, he testified in front of the legislative Duma in Moscow with Sr. Helen Prejean. He added that Russian President Vladimir Putin has come out publicly against the death penalty. So too has UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. Since these two are the closest allies of President Bush, Welch concluded, perhaps they can help persuade the USA to finally give up its grim fascination with the death penalty.

The evening ended with CADP President Madden exhorting the crowd to reenergize themselves. It's time to get to work, and end the death penalty.

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