

## Former Gov. Lowry recalls hard decision to allow execution

Former Gov. Mike Lowry, a liberal Democrat and fierce death-penalty opponent, wrestled with the question of clemency in a 1994 case that forced him to balance his philosophical views with brutal realities.

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[PREV](#) of [NEXT](#)



Former Gov. Mike Lowry doesn't regret decision.

OLYMPIA — In issuing a blanket suspension of executions during his term, Gov. Jay Inslee on Tuesday shielded himself from a future run-in with one of the toughest decisions his job can produce.

Just ask former Gov. Mike Lowry.

Lowry, a liberal Democrat and fierce death-penalty foe, faced the question of giving clemency in a 1994 case that forced him to balance his philosophical views with the realities of a brutal case. Eventually, he allowed triple-murderer Charles Campbell to be hanged.

On Tuesday, he said it was “in some ways the most difficult thing I did as governor.”

“It’s not a decision that a human should really have to make,” he said. “I really think that it’s a question that falls beyond what I consider is our ability as human beings to really comprehend.”

In the Campbell case, Lowry said, he felt comfortable letting the execution go forward only after meeting with families of the victims and the condemned, and the killer himself.

The case represented the very definition of a heinous crime: Campbell, sent to prison for raping a Snohomish County woman at knife point in front of her infant daughter, got out of prison and slit the throats of the woman, the daughter and a neighbor who had testified against him.

But Lowry said that did not play a large role in his decision.

The deciding factor, he said, was that the conviction had survived repeated appeals over 12 years.

“It had been through the extensive process — all of the reviews, all of the appeals,” Lowry said. “That made me choose to let it go ahead.”

It was the only execution under Lowry’s watch.

The former governor said he does not regret his decision, although it has weighed on him over the years.

“When you look back at being governor, there were so many things that I really enjoyed,” Lowry said. “But when I look back, this is one that sticks with me.”

Despite his views, Lowry said the idea of a moratorium on executions never crossed his mind. Maybe it should have, he said.

He applauded Inslee’s move.

“What he’s doing is establishing a policy. He’s not taking these individual cases up when there’s an execution date,” Lowry said. “I think that’s a very good way to govern.”

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