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Ruling may delay killer's execution

By TOM McLAUGHLIN
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State Rep. Matt Gaetz, who pushed for a state law aimed at speeding up imposition of the death penalty, isn't happy with Tuesday's U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

A signed execution warrant seemed imminent for Frank Walls, a serial killer convicted in Okaloosa County and sent to death row in 1988.

But the high court ruling likely will change that.

"I've been working for more than a year to introduce that guy to his maker," Gaetz said.

The court ruled 5-4 that Florida acted unconstitutionally by using a single "bright line" IQ score of 70 to determine whether a killer could be put to death.

Walls' IQ has been pegged at 72. Bill Eddins, state attorney for Florida's First Judicial Circuit, predicted if his death warrant is signed this year it will be challenged both in the U.S. and Florida Supreme Courts.

"We'll make every effort possible to uphold the death penalty in that case," Eddins said.

Walls pleaded no contest to the 1987 murder of Audrey Gygi

and was convicted and sentenced to die in 1988 for the murders of Edward Alger Jr. and Ann Peterson.

He also admitted to killing two other women after reaching a plea agreement in the Gygi case.

Walls' name appeared last October on a list of 123 death row inmates who seemingly had exhausted all or most of their appeals.

The clerk of Florida's Supreme Court had sent the certification letter to the governor to comply with the Timely Justice Act of 2013, sponsored by Gaetz.

Gaetz said Tuesday's Supreme Court decision likely will delay the administration of justice for several death row inmates, including Walls.

"It is unlikely Gov. Scott is going to be able to sign death warrants for death row inmates with pending appeal hearings based on mental retardation," Gaetz said. "The Supreme Court has launched countless death row cases into an appeals oblivion."

However, Eddins said he believed the Supreme Court was trying to make sure justices were using criteria other than an IQ score to determine which inmates suffer "intellectual dis-

ability" and which others could be put to death.

He said he's confident judges in the First Judicial Circuit met the assessment standard the Supreme Court required and his office would not need to review any local death penalty cases.

"We will not be dramatically affected by that ruling," he said.

State Senate President Don Gaetz said the federal court ruling was an admonishment of Florida's justices.

"Florida law provides plenty of ways you can assess intellectual ability," he said. "The problem wasn't the law, it was the Florida Supreme Court."



FRANK WALLS

MOB OF 1 PROTESTS

John Veasey stands against military training in state forests

By LAUREN SAGE REINLIE
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HAROLD — John Veasey stood on the side of the road next to a makeshift sign made of a bedsheet slung over two ladders.

Across the white sheet, block letters were the words: "Keep the military out of our forest!"

Veasey, 61, said Wednesday that while it can be boring standing along U.S. Highway 90 all day, it's worth it.

"Somebody's got to stand up for the people," he said.

Veasey is alarmed by a proposal to allow the military to train in the Blackwater River State Forest. A public hearing is scheduled for next week, and he plans to be out near the entrance to the forest all day every day until then to try to spread the word.

For the past eight years, the Blackwater River has been an idyllic getaway for Veasey and his wife,

PLEASE SEE PROTESTS | A2

INSIDE

Some private landowners say they would be interested in military training | A2



Photos by NICK TOMECEK | Daily News

John Veasey of Niceville talks Wednesday about why he opposes military training in state forests. It was the first day of his protest along U.S. Highway 90 just outside Blackwater River State Forest in Harold. **Below**, John Veasey waves to motorists.

TO LEARN MORE

Read the full report on the proposal at grasieis.leidosemg.com. A public hearing is scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m. June 5 at the Santa Rosa County Bagdad Recreation Facility in Milton.



NICK TOMECEK | Daily News

Jessica Hayward, who has spinal muscle atrophy III, can't afford to replace the wheelchair that gave her mobility. The congregation at Destiny Worship Center is raising funds for a new electric chair.

'I'm just lost'

Woman loses ticket to independence after wheelchair breaks

By KATIE TAMMEN
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MIRAMAR BEACH — When Jessica Hayward was a little girl, she dreamed of chasing tornadoes.

Today the 27-year-old just wants to get to Wal-Mart on her own.

"I'm just lost," said Jessica, who lives in a rehabilitation center with residents three times her age because of spinal muscular atrophy III.

Up until last Thursday, Jessica used an electric wheelchair to get around. Now she's completely dependent on others because it broke and she can't afford a new one.

"I mean I use the wheelchair for everything," she said. "It's my independence."

Diagnosed at age 4, Jessica was in a wheelchair by 13. She learned to accept help from others but embraced the freedom her electric wheelchair afforded her.

She was moved to Grand Boulevard Health and Rehabilitation Center last year because her grandparents couldn't take care of her.

PLEASE SEE WHEELCHAIR | A2

WANT TO HELP?

Destiny Worship Center has organized a fund for Jessica Hayward. People can contact the church at 850-650-6800 or send donations earmarked for Jessica to 122 Poinciana Blvd., Destin, FL 32550

SPORTS

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