

Board Wants Killer Of Omaha Officer Eligible for Parole

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Lincoln — David Rice, sentenced to life in prison 20 years ago for the bombing death of an Omaha police officer, has been recommended for a sentence commutation by the Nebraska Parole Board.

Commutation would make Rice eligible for release on parole. The Parole Board can recommend inmates for commutation to the Nebraska Board of Pardons, which has the authority to grant or deny commutations.



Rice

Parole Board
Chairman Ethel

Landrum informed the pardons board of the recommendation during a monthly pardons board meeting Friday.

The pardons board took no action on the recommendation. It did not even schedule it for further proceedings.

"I was a little surprised that the matter came up. It was not on our agenda," said Attorney General Don Stenberg, one of three members of the pardons board. Gov. Nelson and Secretary of State Allen Beermann are the others.

Stenberg said it was the first time in his two years on the pardons board that the Parole Board had given a recommendation for commutation even before the inmate had filed an application with the pardons board.

Rice has maintained his innocence throughout his imprisonment. He says he was framed because of his leadership in the Nebraska chapter of the National Committee to Combat Fascism, now

defunct. Rice has said the group was affiliated with the Black Panthers.

Rice was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison for the Aug. 17, 1970, booby-trap bomb killing of Larry Minard.

Minard was among officers who responded to a telephoned report that a woman was in a house screaming for help. He died when a suitcase exploded as police were searching the house.

Rice, then 23, was one of three people charged in the slaying. He and Edward Poindexter, then 25, were convicted. The third, Duane Peak, then 15, testified for the state.

Stenberg said he did not know why the case was brought up at this time.

Beermann said the pardons board would not act on the recommendation until it received Rice's application, which is required before the board can act. Beermann said he asked the Parole Board to further review Rice's case.

Chairman Landrum had not yet been appointed the last time the board met with Rice for a review of his case. She told the pardons board that the Parole Board voted 5-0 during an executive session Wednesday to recommend Rice for a commutation.

Before recommending commutations in past first-degree murder cases, the Parole Board has held public hearings. Parole records do not show that a public hearing has been held in the Rice case, parole office staff members said.

Deputy Douglas County Attorney Sam Cooper, who prosecuted the Rice-Poindexter case, said he had not been notified of any plans for such a recommendation. He said he didn't know whether he would oppose it.

He said, however, that he is not comfortable that life sentences are being interpreted as lasting 15 to 20 years.

Stenberg made similar remarks.