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Leaves frame the U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington. (OSV/Reuters/Will Dunham)

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The Supreme Court on Feb. 25 threw out the murder conviction and death penalty for Richard Glossip, an Oklahoma man who has been on death row for a quarter century.

At issue in the case was whether Glossip received a fair trial, and the high court found he did not.

Glossip, a former motel manager, was convicted in the murder-for-hire plot of his boss, Barry Alan Van Treese, at the Best Budget Inn in Oklahoma City in 1997. But Glossip's lawyers have long argued that his conviction should be thrown out based on issues associated with key testimony in the case by Justin Sneed, who carried out the murder. Sneed testified that Glossip had hired him to kill Van Treese, but subsequent investigations have raised concerns that prosecutors had withheld information about Sneed and that he may have given false testimony at the trial.

"Glossip is entitled to a new trial," Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote for the 5-3 majority, stating prosecutors had violated Glossip's constitutional right to due process.



Oklahoma death-row inmate Richard Glossip is pictured in a 2016 photo taken by his attorney. The U.S. Supreme Court on Feb. 25, 2025, threw out the murder conviction and death penalty for Glossip, an Oklahoma man who has been on death row for more than 25 years. (OSV News/Reuters/Don Knight)

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented, voting to uphold Glossip's conviction and death sentence. Justice Amy Coney Barrett argued a state appeals court was the appropriate entity to decide how to proceed.

"This Court is well equipped to answer questions of federal law; it is ill equipped either to determine the credibility of witnesses or to master voluminous trial records," Barrett wrote.

Justice Neil Gorsuch recused himself from the case. While no official reason was given by the court, Gorsuch previously dealt with the case when he was an appeals court judge.

"It's obviously fantastic news," Brett Farley, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Oklahoma, told OSV News.

"This is what we were hoping to hear from the Supreme Court, and it's confirmation from the highest court in the land that there clearly were very serious issues with the miscarriage of justice in that case," he said. "We think that it's emblematic of systematic problems with the capital process in Oklahoma — and I think across the board — and it's one of the reasons why we are calling for a moratorium on the death penalty in Oklahoma."

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, a group that advocates for the abolition of capital punishment in line with Catholic teaching, praised the Supreme Court for making "a life-saving decision."

Vaillancourt Murphy argued Glossip, who has maintained his innocence, "never received a fair trial."

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"His case shows how arbitrarily death sentences are handed down, with the undisputed killer, Mr. Glossip's co-defendant, receiving a life sentence compared to Mr. Glossip's sentence of death," she said. "Mr. Glossip's story has captured the nation's attention because it shines a spotlight on so much of the brokenness in our death penalty system. Oklahoma legislators and even the state attorney general supported that there isn't enough evidence to uphold Mr. Glossip's conviction and death sentence. And now, the highest court in the land has agreed."

While Vaillancourt Murphy welcomed the court's decision, she noted that "the insidious system of death in the state of Oklahoma continues, with an execution scheduled in March."

"The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred, regardless of innocence or guilt," she said. "There is no place for the death penalty in that vision of a consistent ethic of life."

Pope Francis revised the Catechism of the Catholic Church in 2018 to reflect that capital punishment is morally "inadmissible" in the modern world and that the church works with determination for its abolishment worldwide.

The high court previously blocked one of Glossip's scheduled executions after Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond concluded upon investigation that Glossip did not receive a fair trial and should be granted a new one. Asked about Drummond's role in the case, Farley said, "It's unprecedented for any attorney general to do that, let alone a Republican attorney general, let alone a Republican attorney general who's running for governor. So there are a lot of really unprecedented things that have happened around this case."

Although President Donald Trump has moved to increase the use of capital punishment at the federal level, some state-level Republican lawmakers have backed efforts to repeal the practice in their states.

"Here in Oklahoma, increasingly, as we talk to Republican legislators, they will tell us — oftentimes behind closed doors — that they have serious reservations or outright opposition to the death penalty," Farley said, attributing their opposition to pro-life, fiscal, or due process concerns with the practice.