

Opinions

# They're about to turn me into 'the Willie Horton of 2012'

By **Jens Soering**  
June 18, 2012

My name is Jens Soering, my prison ID number is 1161655, and this fall I could influence the future of the United States.

In January, Virginia Republicans — including state Sen. Steve Newman (Lynchburg) and U.S. Rep. Bob Goodlatte — [indicated to reporters](#) they plan to make me an issue in the U.S. Senate race between former governors Timothy Kaine (D)W and George Allen (R). Many commentators believe this race could determine which party controls the Senate after the election, and it could even influence the outcome of the presidential campaign.

How did I, a mere prisoner, get mixed up in such affairs of state?

Two years earlier, on Jan. 12, 2010, four days before leaving office, then-Gov. Kaine [sent a letter](#) to U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr., consenting to my repatriation to Germany. Such a repatriation would be, essentially, an international prison transfer: After spending (at that time) nearly 24 years in Virginia's custody, I was to be sent to my home country for another two years of incarceration before becoming eligible for parole there. In Virginia, I have been eligible for parole since 2003.

But seven days later, on his first working day in office, Virginia's new governor, Robert F. McDonnell (R), [sent Holder a second letter](#) withdrawing consent to my repatriation. This action is [under review](#) by the Richmond Circuit Court, where oral arguments are scheduled for this month. As with the controversy over Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour's [last-minute pardons in January](#), the question is whether a departing governor's decisions can be reversed willy-nilly by his successor.

However, legal niceties are irrelevant to those who wish to use me to harm Kaine. From their perspective, Kaine's agreement to my repatriation is proof that he is soft on crime. And to make their point, they will turn me into the "Willie Horton of 2012," as I have already been called in newspapers. The worse I am made to appear, the more irrational Kaine's decision will seem.

But was that decision irrational?

In 1990, I was [convicted of the 1985 murders](#) of my then-girlfriend's parents, Derek and Nancy Haysom. Although I initially confessed to the crime, I pleaded not guilty at trial, explaining that my false confession was a naive attempt to save my girlfriend from the electric chair. In 2009, DNA tests revealed that none of the blood at the crime scene could be linked to me, although 11 blood samples did belong to an unidentified third person. Although not conclusive proof of innocence, this new evidence was mentioned [in a March 2011 column](#) in the victims' hometown newspaper, the Lynchburg News & Advance, as a reason my request for parole should be seriously considered.

During the 26 years of my incarceration, I have gained the support of a former [deputy attorney general](#) of Virginia, the [former Catholic bishop of Richmond](#) and other notable figures. Nine of my [books](#) and 50 of my articles have been published. And I have not incurred a single infraction of prison rules during my sentence, a feat that correctional staff tell me is nearly unique.

As the Kaine-Allen Senate race heats up, however, Virginia voters will hear little of the above — not the DNA tests, not my supporters, not my books. They will not be encouraged to examine whether questions about my case should give them pause. It will not be much noted that Kaine's act was not a pardon nor a commutation, and that before acting he secured assurances that I would not be released upon my return to Germany for at least another two years and that I would never be permitted to return to the United States.

Instead, I will simply be portrayed as the worst monster in history in order to smear a good man who tries to live by his Christian values, as opposed to just talking about them at campaign rallies.

But why listen to me? I'm just the Willie Horton of 2012.

*The writer is an inmate at Buckingham Correctional Center, where he is serving two life sentences for first-degree murder.*

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