

Jury selected in Belyeu murder trial

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Jury selection in the capital murder trial of Clifton Eugene Belyeu was completed Wednesday after attorneys spent 15 days over a four-week period individually questioning more than 60 potential jurors.

A jury of seven men and five women has been selected to hear testimony in the trial scheduled to begin on July 28. Two alternates, one man and one woman, also were selected.

Belyeu, 27, is accused in the Dec. 10 stabbing and shooting death of Melodie

Bolton, 35, of West.

Belyeu and Earnest Ray Moore, 21, both of Cleburne, were arrested by the McLennan County Sheriff's Department in Johnson County about 12 hours after West car dealer Jerrel Bolton found his wife dead in the bedroom of the couple's home.

Law enforcement authorities believe Mrs. Bolton was killed during a robbery.

Belyeu and Moore are being tried separately. If convicted, both men face a penalty of death by lethal injection or life in prison.

Since June 25, McLennan County Dis-

trict Attorney Vic Feazell, Assistant District Attorney David Deaconson and defense attorneys Ken Ables and Fred Horner have quizzed potential jurors on their ability to consider impartially evidence presented in the case.

"We've been very methodical and have taken our time. We're pleased with the jury," Feazell said Wednesday.

This is the fifth capital murder trial in which Feazell has been involved and his fourth as McLennan County district attorney. He estimates he has been involved in the individual questioning of around 400 potential capital murder

jurors, but said he could not predict if this jury panel will be more or less conservative than previous juries.

"I'll tell you when the verdict comes in. I'm sure they'll be fair and look at the evidence," he said.

Ables and Horner, appointed by 54th District Court Judge George Allen to represent Belyeu, said they also are satisfied with the jury.

"It has taken a long time. But when you're talking about a man's life being at stake, you take your time," Ables said

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Wednesday.

"I feel like we've done a good job and we'll have a good jury that will give us a fair and impartial trial," he said.

Feazell said he anticipates it will take between 1½ and two weeks to present the state's evidence in the case.

Both Feazell and Ables indicated they are pleased with the relatively even split between men and women on the jury panel.

"I don't think it makes any big difference. I wouldn't want a jury that was all men or all women. I like to have at least three of one," Feazell said.

"The psychological profiles we had done prior to the trial indicated that in this particular case there should be no bias as to whether a juror is male or female," Ables said.

During the past four weeks, potential jurors were called into 54th District Court and questioned individually. Some were questioned for as long as three hours, a few were released after as little as 10 minutes.

Before the potential jurors reported for questioning, each filled out a three-page questionnaire intended to aid the attorneys in preparing their questions.

The questionnaire asked questions about religious affiliation, military service, criminal history, previous jury service, exposure to media reports about Mrs. Bolton's murder, last books read and newspapers and magazines read.

The potential jurors were asked if they had ever written a letter to the editor or listened to a Feazell speech on law enforcement.

Probably the most important question on the questionnaire asked if the potential juror believed in the death penalty. A person who answered no was almost immediately dismissed by the prosecution.

"We were looking for somebody who can vote for the death penalty and can listen to the evidence. They're looking for someone who will let him off, and we want to find jurors who will fry him for what he did. As a consequence, what we get is a fair and impartial jury," Feazell said.

"Basically what you look for is someone who will listen to what you have to say and listen to your arguments and evidence and give you a fair trial," Ables said.

During jury selection, both sides repeatedly questioned potential jurors on whether or not they could listen fairly to all the evidence before arriving at a decision as to Belyeu's guilt or innocence.

"One of the biggest fallacies in our society is the presumption of innocent until proven guilty. Actually, if the police arrest someone, they're assumed guilty until proven innocent," Horner said at one point during the questioning.

Feazell and Deaconson spent considerable time explaining to each potential juror how the punishment phase in a capital murder trial is conducted.

If the jury finds Belyeu guilty, jurors will be asked to answer two questions during the punishment phase.

First, the jury is asked to decide if the defendant's conduct was committed "deliberately, with the reasonable expectation that the death of the deceased or another person would result."

Secondly, the jury is asked to decide if there is a "probability that the defendant will commit criminal acts of violence that could constitute a continuing threat to society."

If the jury answers yes to both questions, Allen will sentence Belyeu to death by injection.



Staff photo — Duane Laverty

Cliffon Eugene Belyeu (left) is represented by attorney Ken Ables