**The logic behind setting Caril Ann Fugate freeAllen Beermann**

Many scratched their heads in 1973 when members of the Nebraska Parole Board commuted Caril Ann Fugate’s sentence for murder.

Decades later, one of the three men on that panel said commuting her sentence from life to 30 to 50 years was logical and sensible.

As secretary of state, Allen Beermann, currently executive director of the Nebraska Press Association, was a member of that parole board along with Gov. James J. Exon and Attorney General Clarence A.H. Meyer.

Fugate was eligible for and granted parole in 1976.

“You look at what she has done with her life since the episode. You look at her institutional record while incarcerated. You look to see if she has a support system on the other end. Is she able to be a valuable citizen? Is she employable? Is she willing to work? So we looked at all those things. You also look at the recommendation of the parole board and reports from various psychologists and whatever’s in the file,” Beermann said.

He added that he spent four or five straight evenings just reading Fugate’s huge file back in 1973.

“Then you take testimony at the hearing and you weigh that,” Beermann said. “The one thing you try not to do is retry the case. We don’t substitute ourselves for the jury or the court. Now can we look at some ancillary things? Probably. At the time she was very, very young and she was running around with a monster that’s got a gun. So you wonder how much was her doing and how much was her doing against her will.”

Beermann said there was some evidence that showed Fugate was a hostage in the murder spree and there was evidence that she willingly participated in the murders.

“There were some in the same families of the victims to testify at our hearing that were on opposite sides of the deal. In one family, the mother testified against her, as I recall, and the father in favor of her getting a commutation. That was very interesting,” Beermann said.

In a case with this much national attention, setting Fugate free might make a parole board member second-guess themselves years later.

“You know I really haven’t. We understand that she has done well and is doing well. She has never gotten into any more trouble. She has turned her life around,” Beermann said.

With the examination of all the evidence in the case, a clear question to Beermann is if he thinks that Caril Ann Fugate willingly committed the murders with Charles Starkweather.

“That murder spree was gruesome. They or he, but probably they, were bad people. I have often wondered about that (if Fugate willingly committed the murders). We intentionally tried not to. You just don’t know if a person that age (could do this), of course he was young too. We tried to not retry the case. We had to determine if this person has turned their life around to such an extent that they are worthy of a commutation,” he said, adding that a commutation does not turn a prisoner free. Instead they have to meet the parole board’s standards, requirements and monitoring for years.