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Northwest

Kehoe gets life without parole

White separatist spared death penalty for killing Arkansas family

By Peggy Harris
Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Chevie Kehoe was given three sentences of life in prison without parole Monday for the murders of an Arkansas family as part of a scheme to overthrow the federal government and set up a whites-only nation.

The jury of nine blacks and three whites deliberated about six hours Friday, then met about 30 minutes Monday before announcing they had reached a decision.

"It appears that the jury took a solemn approach to their duties, and this was a difficult decision, but mercy was shown to Chevie," said Kehoe lawyer Mark Hampton.

Co-counsel John Hall said the

defense would appeal the conviction and sentence, although they are still developing their arguments for an appeal.

Prosecutors had asked that Kehoe of Colville, Wash., be put to death for the 1996 killings of Tilly gun dealer William Mueller, his wife Nancy and her 8-year-old daughter Sarah Powell. The three were suffocated with plastic bags, weighed down with rocks and tossed into a western Arkansas bayou during a robbery.

Last week, the jury convicted Kehoe and co-defendant Danny Lee of Yukon, Okla., of racketeering, conspiracy and three counts of murder. The prosecution said the two 26-year-olds were part of an enterprise, headed by Kehoe, that committed crimes to further the cause of

setting up an Aryan People's Republic in the Pacific Northwest.

Jurors are to return today to hear testimony on a sentence for Lee.

U.S. District Judge G. Thomas Eisele will decide the penalties for the racketeering and conspiracy convictions for each man.

Kehoe, wearing a gray suit and dark blue shirt, appeared subdued as the sentences were read Monday and made no comment afterward to reporters as U.S. marshals led him away in handcuffs.

Kehoe's lawyers had argued their client was an intelligent person, a "loving father" of four children who could lead a productive life in prison, even if only to discourage his children from a life of crime. They said Kehoe was from a "dysfunctional family" and was influenced by his parents and others who led him to adopt extrem-

ist political and social views. They said Kehoe's father, Kirby Kehoe, led Chevie into a life of crime.

Jurors found that Chevie Kehoe did not intentionally plan to kill the Muellers or Sarah Powell but only that he intentionally engaged in a violent act that led to their deaths.

Prosecutors would not comment on the sentence. A gag order remains in place for lawyers and parties connected to the case.

Kimma Gurel, Nancy Mueller's sister, said her family would have been satisfied with either a death sentence or life without parole.

Among crimes that jurors found were included in Kehoe's enterprise were the bombing of Spokane City Hall, the 1995 robbery of a Washington couple, the Mueller robbery and murder, and a 1997 Ohio shootout with police.