

## 250 ask to Witness McVeigh Execution - Officials May Arrange Closed-Circuit Telecast

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About 250 survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing and victims' relatives have asked to witness the execution of bomber Timothy McVeigh, federal prosecutors announced Tuesday.

The number far exceeds the eight seats reserved for crime victims' families at the federal Death Row Unit near Terre Haute, Ind., creating the possibility that an unprecedented closed-circuit telecast of the execution might be arranged.

"The responses indicate varying levels of interest in viewing the execution, depending on what arrangements are finalized," the U.S. attorney's office said in a statement.

Federal authorities weren't quite sure last month what to expect when they began surveying the 1,100 families eligible to attend the execution set for May 16. But nearly 550 people on the list traveled to Denver to view portions of Mr. McVeigh's trial and that of bombing co-conspirator Terry Nichols.

Mr. McVeigh, 32, notified a federal judge in December that he was abandoning the second - and final - round of appeals for his June 1997 murder and conspiracy conviction and death sentence.

He offered no explanation for his decision but said he reserved the right to seek executive clemency. Later, he indicated he had no such plans.

"I harbor no illusions that George 'The Reaper' Bush would grant me a commutation of sentence, nor would I beg any man to spare my life," Mr. McVeigh wrote in response to questions from his hometown newspaper, the Buffalo News.

Mr. McVeigh, a decorated Persian Gulf War veteran, was considered by federal prosecutors to be the mastermind of the April 19, 1995, attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building that left 168 dead and more than 500 injured.

Prosecutors contended that Mr. McVeigh carried out the truck bombing - America's worst act of domestic terrorism - in retaliation for what he viewed as the federal government's mishandling of the deadly 51-day standoff with Branch Davidians near Waco in 1993 that ended exactly two years earlier.

Two of Mr. McVeigh's former Army buddies, Mr. Nichols and Michael Fortier, also were prosecuted in the case.

Mr. Nichols, 45, was convicted of conspiracy and manslaughter and sentenced to life in a federal prison without the possibility of parole for his role in the bombing. He also faces 160 state murder charges for non-law enforcement officers killed in the blast.

Mr. Fortier, 32, pleaded guilty to several federal charges - including failure to alert authorities to the bomb plot - and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. He is appealing the length of his punishment.

Oklahoma City attorney Karen Howick said a closed-circuit television feed was perhaps the best alternative to limited seating at Mr. McVeigh's scheduled execution at the Indiana prison.

Ms. Howick helped secure a similar telecast of Mr. McVeigh's and Mr. Nichols' trials, which were moved to Denver because of extensive pretrial publicity.

Several survivors of the bombing asked Ms. Howick to seek the closed-circuit telecast of the execution if the number expressing interest in attending far exceeded the death row unit's seating.

Ms. Howick could not be reached for comment Tuesday, but she said earlier that she would pursue the matter. She said she could find no law prohibiting such a telecast but also noted that she could find no precedent for one.

U.S. Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman Traci Billingsley said closed-circuit coverage is an option.

"I do know the agency is reviewing it," she said.

The U.S. attorney's office said it plans to forward the 250 requests to attend the execution to the Indiana federal prison for further review.

Caption:

PHOTO(S): Timothy McVeigh ... his execution has been set for May 16 in the '95 Oklahoma City bombing.