

Op-ed: Justice, public safety should trump politics

By: MARC A. LEVIN | May 6, 2014



All too often, criminal sentences are based on some kind of gut feeling about what is appropriate. Or worse – they are made harsher for all defendants in response to one horrible, atypical crime. That is in part how the United States came to be home to 25 percent of the world’s prisoners, though our country accounts for only 5 percent of the world’s population.

<http://ctmirror.org/about-us/#submitoped> Recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, relying heavily on the science behind adolescent development, placed limitations on extremely long sentences for juvenile offenders. These rulings meant that many states, included Connecticut, needed to change their sentencing policies.

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Marc A. Levin

The so-called “Second Look” bill passed the state House overwhelmingly last year, but the Senate never voted on it. There is a danger that history will repeat itself this year. In doing nothing, the Senate will be taking a decisive action – whether it likes it or not. It will be tacitly voting for the state to spend millions of dollars on years of litigation as sentences are challenged in court, case by case. Supreme Court rulings do not simply go away.

As a conservative who advocates for a sane and safe reduction in incarceration, I’ve watched many states respond to the dilemma of long juvenile sentences often with far more leniency than is offered by Connecticut’s Second Look Bill, which requires offenders to serve most of their sentences before even qualifying for a parole hearing. The hearing process involves rigorous, objective measures of a person’s rehabilitation. No one is guaranteed release.



I do not pretend to understand Connecticut politics. But I do understand sentencing policy,

and this is a sound one. Justice and public safety should always trump politics.

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DCF’s sending this 16-year-old to adult prison not only underscores the need for immediate action to get this girl into

a more appropriate setting but also illustrates the crying need for Connecticut to develop an appropriate plan for girls in the juvenile justice system.

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