



Congressional Leaders Want ‘Willie Horton Fix’ to Protect Politicians from Released Criminals

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A bipartisan group of federal legislators has drafted a supposed “Willie Horton fix” to revive their stalled push to roll-back federal criminal penalties and release many felons back onto American streets.

Willie Horton was a Massachusetts criminal who was made infamous during the 1988 presidential race by Democratic Sen. Al Gore, and then by GOP candidate George H. W. Bush. The Democratic Governor and candidate for president, Michael Dukakis, had released Horton early from prison in 1986, and he subsequently raped and killed a woman in Maryland. Horton also murdered the woman’s fiancé. Dukakis’s early-release program made him seem soft on crime and so he was soundly defeated in the November election.

Horton’s actions, and Dukakis’s punishment, are a garish warning to the politicians who are trying to reduce the tough federal penalties that have helped reverse the dramatic 1970s spike in crime and murder. Those politicians now include President Barack Obama and House Speaker [Rep. Paul Ryan \(R-WI\)](#), both of whom support the proposed legislation to roll-back federal criminal penalties.

Supporters of the bill are having a tough time persuading other politicians to risk their own Willie Horton trauma — especially because the national crime rate is rising, [public alarm about crime is spiking](#), and crime may become a big issue in the 2016 election.

“You’re never going to eliminate the Willie Horton type of situation, the political ads aside, of somebody coming out [of prison] and committing a crime,” said a Senate aide who is pushing for the penalty rollback, according to an article posted by the [Washington Examiner](#).

That job of persuasion is also being made difficult by determined opposition from some GOP politicians, including [Sen. Jeff Sessions \(R-AL\)](#) and [Sen. Ted Cruz \(R-TX\)](#). Arkansas [Sen. Tom Cotton \(R-AR\)](#) has been adamant in opposition.

An updated version of the bill was obtained by the *Washington Examiner*, which is being floated by supporters who hope the changes might make the thing more palatable for those who are not supportive.

According to the *Examiner*, the updated bill is being shopped by Senate Majority Whip Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, and Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT), all of whom are Republicans. A GOP Senate aide insisted the new language is a “good middle-ground that people should be more comfortable with.”

The changes include the elimination of the “retroactive relief for any offender who is convicted of a serious violent felony,” according to the source. Another change was the deletion of a provision that would lower the mandatory minimum sentence for armed career criminals.

Other changes, say the advocates, would make sure violent offenders don’t get released early or have their sentences reduced.

But even the aide quoted by the *Examiner* noted that a Willie Horton situation cannot be eliminated. “It’s the nature of the human being. You’re never going to have 100 percent certainty, that’s never going to happen. But it would be a shame to just not ever do any sentencing reform, any criminal justice reform, because of that,” said the Senate aide.

But this is precisely the worry those who oppose the bill have. Tom Cotton, for one, has been a major detractor of the reform.

In January the Arkansas Senator first elected in 2014 called the bill dangerous. “It would be very dangerous and unwise to proceed with the Senate Judiciary bill, which would lead to the release of thousands of violent felons,” Cotton told *Politico*. “I think it’s no surprise that Republicans are divided on this question... [but] I don’t think any Republicans want legislation that is going to let out violent felons, which this bill would do.”

Indeed, according to figures released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the national murder rate rose 6.2 percent during the first six months of 2015.

The FBI’s statistics only cover the first half of 2015 but other sources have tallied a much higher climb in murders. According to the left-leaning Marshall Project, murder rates increased 14.6 percent in 2015. And according to other sources, the murder rate climbed by a frightening 16 percent.

Detractors of the reform bill feel that some of these criminals are exactly who the sentencing reform bill may release out into the public.

James P. Pinkerton, a former member of the White House domestic policy offices of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush as well as a Fox News and Breitbart news contributor notes that the siren call of sentencing reform has been a common refrain in Washington.

“‘Sentencing reform’ has always been a rendezvous point for ‘right-libertarians’ and ‘left-libertarians,’” Pinkerton told Breitbart News. “For ACLU-type left-libertarians, the appeal is obvious: Ease up on crime, because, in their view, most criminals are the victims of racism and

other aggressions, macro- and micro, and thus should not to be punished for their crimes. Moreover, they might be future Democratic voters!”

Pinkerton continued to reveal why the idea is so appealing even for some right-leaning organizations that might not seem obvious.

“Given the obvious partisan tilt of the issue, it might seem harder to understand why Cato Institute-type right-libertarians would like ‘sentencing reform,’” Pinkerton noted. “Yet upon examination, we can see why: First, it saves the government money — even if the cost of criminality is simply transferred from the state’s prison system to the citizenry as a whole. In addition, as with left-libertarians, right-libertarians have an instinctive mistrust of state power; so if they can’t abolish the state, well, at least they can abolish this little bit of it.”