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OPINION

To Build A Better World, Start In Your Own Community

EDITORIAL

Parole laws need revamping

Colorado law provides most people convicted of crimes, even heinous offenses, with an opportunity to seek early release from prison. The formula governing the portion of the sentence he or she must serve before being eligible for parole is complicated — based on the type and circumstances of the

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crime, the person's previous criminal history, the level of his or her involvement in the crime and the year when the crime was committed.

Because Colorado law regarding parole changes every year, even prosecutors have a hard time untangling the rules to determine the length

of time a convicted felon will actually spend in prison.

Will a person sentenced to 48 years in a state correctional facility actually serve that time? It's difficult to say. While laws on the books that seem to guarantee violent criminals will serve 75 percent of their sentences, in reality, those criminals actually might spend only 55 percent of their sentences behind bars.

The state, purposefully, has allowed for some measure of leniency and put its faith in the parole board, using Colorado's complicated rules, to determine when a person should be set free. Thus, Larry Long, who was convicted of stabbing and killing his Longmont parents and younger brother in 1986, had the right to ask that board for release into community corrections.

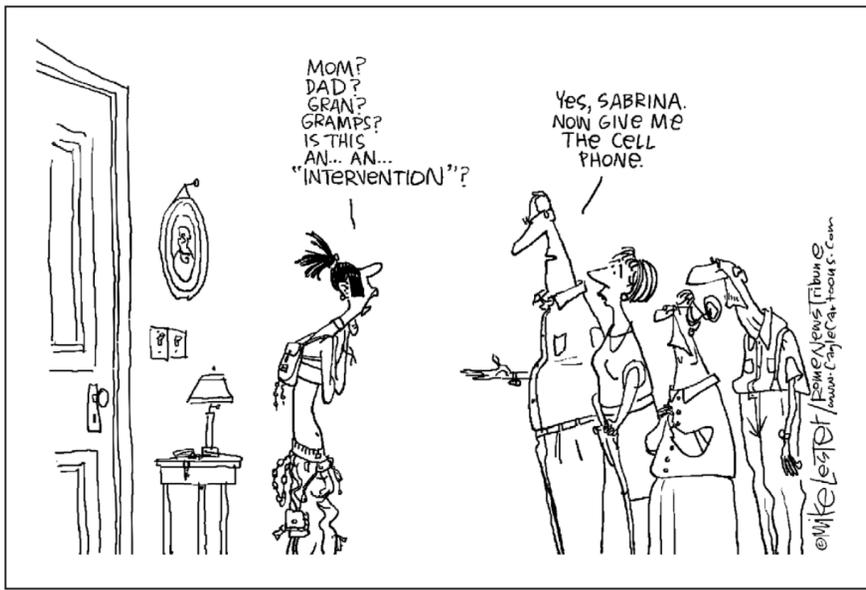
The state's faith is not misguided. Four of seven parole board members aren't likely to let an extremely violent criminal out on the street early.

And the parole board probably will not allow Long — who, if he serves his full sentence, will be released in 2034 — to move to a halfway house for the remainder of his sentence. His was a cruel and brutal crime, the "most heinous" crime Longmont Cmdr. Craig Earhart has ever investigated.

Still, the victims and community who suffered at his hands deserved to know at the time of sentencing how long he would remain behind bars. There should be no surprises for the victims of a heinous crime.

Under Illinois' truth-in-sentencing law, when someone is sentenced, that person will serve 50 percent of that sentence, as a general rule. If the judge or jury finds the victim suffered serious bodily injury, the offender will serve 85 percent of the sentence. For murder, the sentence is 20 to 60 years in prison, and the offender will serve 100 percent of that sentence.

Colorado legislators should follow Illinois' lead and craft a truth-in-sentencing law for this state's offenders. Colorado victims and communities deserve no less.



Open Forum

Let the sun set on some local taxes

The city of Longmont is pondering a 0.4 percent public safety sales tax increase, while at the same time the Boulder County commissioners want 0.2 percent more for a transportation tax.

It seems that certain local politicians think there is a bottomless pit of sales tax money available from the public.

The total sales tax in Longmont is already at an all-time high of 7.70 percent. This total is paid by consumers on every retail purchase, restaurant meal, phone bill and Xcel Energy bill. It all adds up.

While sales tax revenue is a primary source of funding for local governments, excessive piling on of sales taxes beyond the lofty 8 percent mark becomes counterproductive to the local economy.

Shoppers will shift toward areas where the sale tax is much lower, such as the new retail stores going up along Interstate 25 in Weld County. Tax-free Internet sales also will continue to surge, benefiting neither local business or government.

It's high time for some creative financing by local governments to keep the total sales tax levels in check.

Boulder County should ratchet down the open space extravaganza it has propagated for nearly two decades. Plenty of open space has been accumulated at great cost; we don't need to keep paying 0.45 percent in three different open space sales taxes to the county. These taxes should be eliminated one by one before any new initiative, such as a transportation sales tax, is proposed.

Similarly, Longmont could sunset its 0.2 percent open space sales tax at the end of 2006 and replace it with a trimmed-down 0.2 percent public safety tax. This would result in no net increase in city sales tax.

Public safety priorities would be addressed, and the ballot proposal in November would have virtual guaranteed passage.

DAVE LARISON
Longmont

Unwilling to pay for city's growth

After reading that Mike Butler, Longmont police chief, has requested that the taxpayers be asked to approve an additional half-cent of sales tax to support more policemen and firefighters to provide services for our rapidly expanding city, I would like to say personally to Mayor Pirnack and the City Council: "I told you so."

In their unbridled greed to see Longmont boundaries explode and be put in the record book as having the most big-box retail space per capita of any U.S. city, without having any realistic idea of the overall long-term economic benefit to the city, they'll have succeeded in sticking the people whose best interests they are supposed to be working for with the bill if the voters were to unwisely approve this additional sales tax.

Also, it is an insult to all of us that LifeBridge Christian Church, in its own worldly greed to become a mega-church/retail/residential community, would be more than happy to have the taxpayers fund its safety services. Here's an idea: Let them pass the collection plate around an extra couple of rounds on Sunday and pay for it themselves.

Just like the developers are now required by law to fund school infrastructure capacity for new housing developments, so too should they be required to pay for the initial funding of other city services needed for new commercial or residential developments.

It is high time that the taxpayers let their voices be heard and make it clear to the local politicians that if they want cake — and then they

go ahead and bake it without asking the taxpayers if we want any or what type — they can't then turn around and tell us that we have to eat it anyway!

MIKE GRANGER
Longmont

Cast your ballot for Don Marostica

I am writing to support Don Marostica's candidacy for the Republican nomination for the state House.

As a fellow real estate professional, I have witnessed Marostica's efforts to integrate affordable housing in his projects by donating multiple sites to Habitat for Humanity. Such leadership led to his appointment by the governor to the State Housing Board.

Marostica's judgment on Loveland's City Council helped to bring in new jobs and sales tax revenue. Concurrently, Marostica represented the region well on the North Front Range Transportation and Air Quality Commission. Accordingly, Marostica will be a tireless advocate for economic development and will ensure that northern Colorado receives its fair share of transportation funding.

Marostica's charitable devotion is also exceptional. His leadership and generosity led to his appointment to the Poudre Valley Health System Foundation Board.

He also played an active role in fundraising for local youth via the Boys and Girls Clubs of Larimer County and other organizations.

Knowing the quality of Marostica's character and the strength of his qualifications, I urge your readers to support Don Marostica; the results will not disappoint.

RYAN J. SCHAEFER
Fort Collins

President Bush has wrong priorities

Well, George Bush has finally done it. He vetoed his very first legislation in nearly six years in office. And what horrible piece of law did he veto? Was it tax cuts in a time of war? That might be worthy.

Was it budget-busting bridges to nowhere that benefit only a few dozen citizens? That might deserve a veto.

No. He reserved his powerful veto pen for stem cell research funding, a science supported by a majority of the American people, the Congress and the Senate. George Bush says he values life. How hypocritical can you get?

What about the millions of American citizens and taxpayers who might be helped by this research — actual living, breathing human beings with families? No, a clump of cells that is headed for the trash bin is more important. What pseudo-religious nonsense.

Most people have the good sense to see priorities. Not our president.

ROSE SWENBY
Longmont

When does gasohol makes sense?

I have read a lot lately about the new gasoline-ethanol blends, but not much about the cost trade-offs involved. The fact is your car will not go as far on most ethanol blends as on regular gasoline with the same octane rating.

I have measured the effect of E10 fuel over many years. (E10 is the 10 percent ethanol blend that is commonly sold in the Denver metro area.) In my newest vehicle (a 2002 Honda CR-V), I get 7 percent fewer miles per gallon when I burn E10 fuel. This means that when I purchase E10 fuel, it has to be priced about 20 cents lower per gallon than regular gasoline to give me the same distance per dollar at today's price of \$3 per gallon.

Another way of looking at it is that it is worth it to pay up to 20 cents per gallon more for regular gasoline when compared to E10.

Unfortunately, E10 and regular gasoline are priced about the same here in Colorado, despite a 54-cent-per-gallon federal tax credit for ethanol.

If the public was more aware of these facts, the market would force the gasoline retailers to adjust their pricing.

The state of Iowa has a fleet of flexible-fuel vehicles, and they report a 17 percent reduction of miles per gallon when burning E85 (85 percent ethanol). Given these numbers, it makes no sense to purchase E85 unless it is priced 50 cents per gallon lower than regular gasoline at today's prices.

RUSSELL JOSEPHSON
Longmont

What it would take for peace in the Mideast

One of the reasons so many Americans seem to have polarized opinions toward the ongoing conflict over the "occupied territories" in Palestine is because that term is defined much differently here in the United States than it is in the Middle East.

Most Americans believe — indeed, they are often led to believe — the "occupied territories" refers to the small areas around the nation of Israel that were captured during or after the 1967 war. These areas include the Gaza, the West Bank and control of Jerusalem. They often assume that groups like the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Arab nations that support them are trying to help the displaced Palestinians regain these occupied territories, and then they can negotiate peace with Israel toward building a Palestinian homeland.

But the term "occupied territories" means something very different to the Palestinians and those who are working on their behalf against Israel. To the Arab world, the "occupied territories" are not simply the areas Israel took in the 1967 war, but every square inch of land in Palestine, including the land that was given to Israel by the United Nations in 1948. No Arab terrorist group, Palestinian representative or neighboring Arab nation believes Israel has any right to live in any area of Palestine — period.

We need to understand and use this mindset when we look at what happens every day in the Mideast. The Palestinian terrorists' goal is simple: remove all Israelis from "occupied" Palestine and regain all of their land.

The mindset for Israel also is simple: fight to survive as a nation in an area where none of their neighbors believes they have a right to exist. Until America and the United Nations understands and admits this is the reality, there is no hope at all for peace whatsoever.

LORNE BANDY
Longmont

Elect Jim Rettew to Colorado House

The first election of this very important campaign for state House District 13 is Tuesday, Aug. 8. I am enthusiastically supporting Jim Rettew! He is a dynamic and energetic young man dedicated to making education and health care affordable and available to all. He cares about our environment, voting reform and protecting the consumer. Rettew has shown that he is very hard working, sincere and trustworthy. Jim is pro-people. Talk with your family, friends and acquaintances and encourage them to go to the polls on Aug. 8 and cast their votes for Rettew.

AGNES BURKS
Lyons

Border problems shift north

By Tom Fitton

Special to the Daily Times-Call

It took the brutal attack of a construction company owner, but local police in Warren County, Ohio, finally woke up to a grim truth about the illegal immigration problem: Every town is now a border town.

On July 15, James Parsons Jr. was beaten with a baseball bat in retaliation for the firing of a suspected illegal alien. Parson's offense? He had asked the worker to produce papers proving he was legally eligible to work in the United States, and then he dismissed the worker when he failed to produce them. The disgruntled man and eight accomplices later returned with three handguns and several baseball bats to take their revenge.

While it is true that the majority of illegals flood across the United States' southern border with Mexico, it is becoming increasingly obvious that many do not stay in the Southwest. They migrate to points all across the United States, bringing with them significant social problems, including violent crime. In other words, what begins as a federal issue — border security — quickly becomes a local one. And how are our local law enforcement agencies responding?

Some have chosen to aggravate the problem by instituting so-called "sanctuary policies" that prevent local police officers from inquiring about an individual's immigration status or cooperating with federal immigration officials. They claim illegal immigration is a federal problem and that they do not have the authority or resources to enforce immigration laws.

However, as Judicial Watch recently learned from newly released government documents, both of these claims are patently false.

According to records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, the 1996 Immigration and Nationality Act "authorized the Secretary of Homeland Security to enter into a written agreement to delegate the authority of enforcing federal immigration laws to a state or political subdivision of a state." Moreover, through Immigration and Customs Enforcement, local law enforcement officers can receive immigration enforcement training, called 287(g) cross designation training. The cost for the five-week program is a very reasonable \$520 per officer.

Now for the important question: Does the program work?

As of June, 136 officers had received 287(g) training from four states: Alabama, Arizona, California and Florida. These officers have accounted for 820 immigration-related arrests since the program began in 2002. And while many of the arrests relate to fraudulent documents, others involve rape, drug possession, firearm possession, driving under the influence and burglary.

There is no question the federal government has a responsibility to secure our nation's borders. And there is no question the federal government must do a better job of it. But when the system breaks down, local law enforcement cannot abandon its sworn duty to "protect and serve" the American people. As these documents show, local communities that sincerely want to enforce immigration laws can do so legally and cost effectively.

Tom Fitton is president of Judicial Watch, a non-partisan educational foundation that fights government corruption. Visit www.judicialwatch.org for more information.

Views from the World's Press

Criticizing Israel

Criticism of Israel's attacks in Lebanon has been severe during the past days. Very rightly.

The Israeli attacks not only strike Hezbollah but also hit Lebanese civilians hard. ... It is also hard to believe that Israel's own security will improve if neighboring Lebanon is again thrown into political chaos. Israel has everything to win from listening to the international community, which appeals for restraint and negotiations. ...

There is a risk, however, that the criticism of Israel's actions can be transformed into an indirect support for Israel's enemies. ...

Israel's right to exist and to defend its borders and the security of its citizens is not in question. Or rather: Should not be in question. The reality is that Israel exists in environs where many wish its obliteration. ... Real friends dare to criticize. But support is unchanged.

— Sydsvenska Dagbladet
(Malmö, Sweden)

Letters welcome

The Daily Times-Call encourages its readers to share their views. Short letters, about one typewritten, double-spaced page, on timely topics get preference. We will print as many letters as space allows.

Letters must be signed. We don't publish anonymous letters, poetry, letters signed with a pseudonym or letters addressed to a third party.

For verification, please include your address and daytime phone number. (We do not publish them.) Letters must be 300 words or shorter. Do not send e-mail letters as an attachment.

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