

Controlling sexual predators

Horrifying stories about the rapes and murders of children and judges who go easy on sex offenders who prey on the young, have prompted some state legislatures to tighten the laws and restrict judges' sentencing discretion.

Few in the media or among the intelligentsia have been as outraged about these sadistic

By Thomas Sowell

crimes against children as about possible intercepts of terrorists' phone calls.

Part of this is current politics but part is continuation of a tradition that goes back more than two centuries, de-emphasizing the punishment of criminals.

Those now citing the flaws of "society" as the "root causes" of crime echo 18th-century positions of France's Marquis de Condorcet and England's William Godwin, among others. So are those who speak loftily of "alternatives to incarceration" or continue to rely on hopes of

"rehabilitation" or "prevention."

People with this mindset engage in much hand-wringing about what to do with sexual predators. Many ordinary people would say they should be locked up, and the key thrown away if they are too dangerous to be at large.

But those whose whole sense of themselves is based on their presumed superiority to ordinary people can never go along. They balk even at notifying the public when some convicted sexual predator is released into their neighborhood.

Their thinking — if it can be called that — is that sexual predators released from prison have "paid their debt to society" and the slate should be wiped clean and these sadists allowed to hide their past. It is amazing how many innocent young lives have been sacrificed for a half-baked phrase.

Going to jail doesn't repay anything. People are put behind bars as punishment and to keep them out of circulation. Child victims of rape and murder cannot be made whole. The debt

can never be repaid.

The most we can hope to do is spare other children and their parents from the anguish inflicted by evil people — not "sick" people, but evil people. Sexual predators know exactly what they are doing, know it is wrong, and either don't care or enjoy it all the more for that reason.

Saying they are "sick" implies there is some treatment or cure other people can apply to them. How many more lives are we prepared to sacrifice on the altar to that notion?

The illusion of being able to control sexual predators set loose in secrecy among families with children has taken many forms and has been couched in much soothing rhetoric.

"Supervised" parole is one of those soothing phrases. The reality is an occasional reporting to a parole officer who has huge numbers of parolees — who cannot be controlled the other 99 percent of the time when not reporting.

The latest pretense of control is the global positioning satellite monitor (GPS) which can be at-

tached to sexual predators.

Think about it: What would a global positioning satellite have told us when a sexual predator had two girls imprisoned in his basement? That he was home. What reassurance.

While rising public pressures to get serious about protecting children have forced some state legislatures to make some efforts in that direction, resistance and evasion are still the order of the day in many places.

The California state legislature is considering bills to use GPS to track released sex offenders — but only those deemed "dangerous." The sponsor of one such bill describes GPS as "incredibly valuable technology." Not doubt it is — if you are lost and want to find your way. On the other hand, if you don't want to be found, you can always remove it.

The bills in the California legislature are presented as alternatives to a ballot initiative by which the voters could impose "Jessica's Law" with some real teeth in it on sentencing, instead of these political alternatives to reality.

Thomas Sowell is a nationally syndicated columnist.