



ABA Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions

Sentence Reduction Mechanisms in a Determinate Sentencing System
Report of the Second Look Roundtable

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Introduction

On December 8, 2008, the ABA Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions sponsored a roundtable conference in Washington, D.C., to begin a discussion of ways to reduce the prison terms of people convicted and sentenced for federal crimes. Interest in reforming federal sentencing laws has generally been focused on the prison term imposed by the court at the front end of the sentence, while this conference focuses on ways to reduce a prison term at the back end, after it has otherwise become final. The authorities that permit reduction of the court-imposed sentence are known collectively as “second look” provisions, a term that originated in the project to revise the sentencing articles of the Model Penal Code.

It has taken a long time to add back-end issues to the conversation about federal sentencing reform, because providing for mid-course correction in a sentence lawfully imposed has been regarded as fundamentally at odds with principles of truth in sentencing. That article of determinacy’s faith is now being questioned, as reflected in the report that follows.

The roundtable format involved brief presentation of papers followed by a moderated discussion among participants at the roundtable. The moderator was Jeremy Travis, President of John Jay College, who deftly managed a large and occasionally unruly group of judges, practitioners, and academics. Following the morning and afternoon sessions there was an opportunity for comments from the observers on points that had not previously been raised. Justice Anthony Kennedy joined the roundtable for part of its afternoon session. Participants are identified by name only with their permission. A list of participants follows the report, and the papers prepared for the conference are also published in this issue.

Overview of Issues

Second look provisions fall into two conceptually distinct categories. The first includes provisions that authorize reduction of a prison term when extraordinary circumstances make the term originally imposed seem unreasonable or unjust. Sometimes these extraordinary circumstances are present from the very beginning, even if they don't become apparent until later. Sometimes they arise after the passage of time, if continued imprisonment comes to seem unjust because a prisoner's circumstances change, or because our collective view of an appropriate punishment changes. With this first category of second look provision, the justification for sentence reduction is peculiar to an individual prisoner, like terminal illness or exigent family circumstances, and has nothing to do with generalized concerns about over-incarceration. Most sentencing systems include some fail-safe mechanism to deal with such situations, clemency being the classic example. The question is when fail-safe mechanisms should be called into play, and how they can most effectively be administered.

The second category of "second look" provision consists of sentence reduction mechanisms that are available on a more routine basis to all or most similarly situated prisoners, and can therefore be factored into the prison term imposed by the court (unless enacted after the fact). This sort of sentence reduction mechanism is not aimed at doing justice in a particular case, but rather at addressing correctional management and budget concerns. Parole and good time are paradigmatic examples of this second kind of sentence reduction authority, as are repatriation mechanisms like treaty transfer. Retroactive application of changes in sentencing guidelines or laws is a systemic remedy that may claim a place in both categories.

Extraordinary sentence reduction mechanisms like clemency are essential elements of a just system no matter how long a prison term may be, though their value in monetary terms is by definition hard to quantify. The fiscal impact of routine sentence reduction mechanisms can be easily determined, and their value in human terms is considerably greater when prison terms are relatively lengthy, as they are in the federal

system.¹ Both types of second look authority can and should be administered with an eye toward improving public safety outcomes.

In the years since enactment of the 1984 Federal Sentencing Reform Act (SRA), most of the interest in reforming the system has focused on the length of the prison term initially imposed by the court at the front end, and not on the possible need to take a second look at sentences at the back end. This is hardly surprising, given the premium the SRA placed on certainty and finality. Under the “truth in sentencing” principles of determinacy, the prison term imposed in open court, pursuant to a set of generally applicable rules promulgated by an expert administrative body, was supposed to be the one the defendant actually served, no more and no less. Good time credit was reduced to a minimum and made automatic, so that it is useful only to punish bad conduct. Early release on parole supervision was abolished entirely. It does not appear that the drafters of the SRA gave much thought to “extraordinary” cases, though they extended into the new law a provision authorizing a court to reduce a prison term for “extraordinary and compelling reasons” at the request of prison authorities.

But the laudable guiding principles of determinacy were undermined in the federal system almost from the beginning by a political environment that produced sentencing rules of extraordinary severity.² Lengthy prison terms imposed with little regard to individual circumstances have made federal “truth in sentencing” hard to defend on moral or any other grounds, and all the more so without access to a reliable fail safe

¹ According to Bureau of Prisons statistics in February 2009, 84,000 individuals (42% of the federal prison population) are serving federal prison terms of 10 years or longer. Twenty-four thousand individuals are serving terms longer than 20 years, of whom 6000 are serving life with no possibility of release. Data from the United States Sentencing Commission indicates that federal prison sentences are on average getting longer, notwithstanding a substantial return of discretion to sentencing judges.

² In 1984 the average prison term served was 26 months, and nearly 40% of federal offenders did not go to prison at all. United States Sentencing Commission, *Fifteen Years of Guideline Sentencing* 46 (2004). Twenty-five years later, in 2004 the corresponding figures were 75 months and 7.7% (8.4% for U.S. citizens). United States Sentencing Commission, *Alternative Sentencing in the Federal Criminal Justice System* 5 (2009). During this same period the federal prison population increased by a factor of six, after thirty years of relative stability. See John W. Roberts, *Introduction*, ESCAPING PRISON MYTHS, John W. Roberts, ed., 15-16 (1994).

mechanism.³ Without any ability to affect the duration of their punishment, prisoners may have no incentive to deal with the behaviors that brought them to prison in the first place. An individual's circumstances can change so dramatically over the course of 20 or 30 years that the sentence originally imposed may no longer be justifiable, even without some intervening extraordinary development, blurring the distinction between the two categories of "second look" mechanisms. It is to this unsettling situation that the papers prepared for the conference are addressed.⁴

The conference papers point out that there are a number of authorities in existing law by which federal prison sentences may be reduced, both in extraordinary circumstances and more routinely. The roundtable discussion confirmed participants' experience that these authorities are used infrequently or not at all. The Justice Department (including prison officials) has been reluctant to take actions or implement policies that would result in shortened prison terms, and programs to repatriate non-citizen federal prisoners have been underutilized or not utilized at all. Executive clemency, never a reliable tool of justice even in its 19th century heyday, has been essentially unusable since the system for its administration in the Justice Department broke down during the Clinton Administration. The one hopeful note is the relative ease with which courts have given retroactive effect to the 2007 changes in the crack cocaine sentencing guidelines. Notwithstanding the Attorney General's dire predictions of violence in the streets and paralysis in government, thousands of prisoners have had their sentences reduced in the past year without unduly burdening the system.

If there was a single point of consensus around the table it was that a just sentencing system ought to include some second look mechanism for mitigating the necessary harshness of the first look, particularly when a prison term is very long and a

³ Neither the pardon power nor the judicial sentence reduction mechanism in 18 U.S.C. 3582(c)(1)(A)(i) have been used with any degree of frequency or regularity in the past 25 years. Indeed, in the past eight years there have been numerically fewer early releases under both authorities than in the previous eight-year period. Between 2001 and 2008 BOP filed 168 sentence reduction motions; between 1993 and 2000 it filed 185 such motions. Sixty-one prison sentences were commuted by President Clinton, and 11 by President Bush.

⁴ The conference papers are published in Volume 22, Issue ___ of the Federal Sentencing Reporter, and are available for downloading at the Commission's website, www.abanet.org/cecs.

prisoner's circumstances (or society's views) have changed since the sentence was imposed. It was generally agreed that second look authorities can and should be reconciled with principles of determinacy to bolster their legitimacy, and justified in terms of public safety and economy as well as fairness. Federal law already includes several second look mechanisms that could be administered more aggressively by prison authorities to conserve correctional resources. In a few cases, existing authority could be helpfully modified. Opinion was divided as to whether the constitutional pardon power should be used to deal with systemic issues as well as exceptional cases. Different second look authorities should be viewed in relationship to one another, and their functions distinguished to the extent possible.

The report that follows summarizes the questions raised and viewpoints expressed in the course of the day, and it concludes with specific recommendations made by individual roundtable participants to the new administration, to Congress, and to the courts.

Second Look Roundtable

There is a sense of urgency, a sense of loss that we had something in earlier times in our nation's history that we've lost that was important to us. There is also a sense of a hope that some very concrete actions will be recommended to us throughout the day that we can move on as an agenda for change.

-- Jeremy Travis

I. Reinvigorating the Pardon Power and Improving its Administration

Executive clemency has not been used for many years as a routine early release mechanism, and no one proposes such a role for it now. But there is a felt need in the federal system for some way to reduce a prison sentence that is regarded as unjustly harsh, either because a prisoner's circumstances have changed or because the prison term imposed was disproportionate to begin with. Papers prepared by Rachel Barkow and Dan Kobil argue for greater use of the pardon power as an error-correcting mechanism, both defining error in this context broadly.⁵ Understanding that clemency operates in a hostile political and jurisprudential climate, their papers both suggest ways to administer the power to enlist public support for its use.

Summarizing her paper at the roundtable, Professor Barkow proposed to apply lessons of sentencing reform to clemency decision-making, to reduce risks while emphasizing benefits. She recommends the creation of a clemency advisory board composed of all segments of the justice community,⁶ including prosecutors and victims, and consideration of less risky categories of offenders. A clemency commission could produce the same kind of data as a sentencing commission to highlight clemency's cost savings and public safety gains, since "mercy hasn't really worked as a politically

⁵ Rachel Barkow, *The Politics of Forgiveness: Reconceptualizing Clemency*, __ FSR __; Daniel Kobil, *Resuscitating the Clemency Authority to Achieve Federal Sentencing Reform*, __ FSR __.

⁶ The composition of a pardon board should be diverse and balanced:

This need for diversity means that clemency boards should not be mere arms of law enforcement interests, for that could skew them too far in the opposite direction, against issuing any grants at all. The pardon process at the Department of Justice, for instance, has become dominated by prosecutors, which helps explain the anemic role pardons plays at the federal level. Instead, clemency boards should mimic the most successful state sentencing commissions, which are careful to mix law enforcement interests with those of defense lawyers and former offenders so that each side can learn from each other and increase the likelihood that sound conclusions will be reached and less subject to political attack later.

saleable way of approaching clemency.” She pointed to recent examples of state governors who have used their pardon power successfully (Ehrlich of Maryland, Kaine of Virginia, and Huckabee of Arkansas), publicly grounded their pardoning in religious faith or obligation of office, in both cases gaining a measure of protection from political blow-back. She emphasizes that pardoning becomes easier with regular exercise:

While these changes may yield only modest improvements initially, each successful clemency grant makes the case for additional grants. That is, as the practice of clemency once again becomes a regular one, bearing societal benefits, the risk of any one decision going wrong is not as great. The result should be, over time, a return to an era which clemency is a key part of a functioning system of justice.

Professor Kobil agreed that coalition-building and a reliable system for administering the power can give political cover to an executive otherwise disinclined to take the safe course of inaction in clemency matters. He expressed concern about prosecutors exercising too much influence in the federal clemency advisory process, and recommends that this responsibility should be placed in the hands of an independent body of experts instead of the Justice Department:

There is an inherent conflict of interest present when the Justice Department acts as the primary gatekeeper for clemency, given that its primary role is to prosecute cases and enforce the law. . . . This tension is particularly pronounced when it comes to commutations, a form of clemency by means of which the president shortens or eliminates the very sentences that federal prosecutors have worked hard to impose. Although many states are also struggling with how to exercise the clemency power in a meaningful fashion, no state gives the primary authority for processing clemency requests to the office of the Attorney General or to another body charged with principally with prosecutorial duties.

The roundtable discussion centered around three questions:

- What is the most useful and appropriate role for the pardon power to play in a determinate sentencing system?
- Under what circumstances should executive clemency be used to reduce a lawfully-imposed sentence?
- How can the pardon power be insulated from politics to permit the executive to act more boldly to set an agenda?

There was general consensus around the table that there are institutional objections to using the pardon power routinely to reduce prison sentences in a highly regulated system. Grants of clemency can demonstrate the need for law reform, but they should not be expected to substitute for it, with the president in effect acting as a legislature of one. As Judge Nancy Gertner put it, clemency may be an appropriate remedy for the occasional sentencing error, but “you can’t use [pardon] at the back end to make up for severe problems at the front end.” The pressure put on the clemency mechanism to perform a routine second look function may reflect on Congress’ wisdom in abolishing parole, but using the pardon power in this fashion would set the president at cross purposes with Congress.⁷ Moreover, proposals to “ramp up” clemency in the federal system may be stymied by the resources this would require from prosecutors and courts. Kate Stith remarked that proposals for clemency commissions seem to reflect nostalgia for parole. Citing the Connecticut clemency board as an example, she suggested that data-driven clemency decision-making could avoid an entitlement system like the one that led Willie Horton’s release in Massachusetts. Another participant noted that political constraints on exercise of the power might be avoided if a commission or board made “routine large-scale recommendations to be approve routinely.”

At the same time, no one disagreed that the pardon power can and should play an error-correcting function -- though not everyone agreed about what constitutes error in this context. For example, if many crack cocaine sentences are unjustly long, it does not follow that clemency is the appropriate remedy to reduce the length of those sentences on a wholesale basis. John Steer proposed a distinction between cases involving individuals whose circumstances have changed since sentencing, which may appropriately be addressed through clemency or some other “extraordinary” second look authority, and cases where there has been a generalized change of heart about the fairness of a particular sentencing scheme, which the president should address by seeking changes in the law and

⁷ Pardon played a paroling function in the federal system until well into the 20th century, but there are institutional as well as political reasons why pardon cannot reclaim a territory that has been occupied by Congress.

applying them retroactively. He cited the recent example of the changes in the crack cocaine guidelines.

When pardon is used to cut short prison sentences lawfully imposed pursuant to guidelines or statutory mandatory minimums, it risks disrespecting courts as well as Congress. Prosecutors can also be expected to resist the use of commutations to undo the results of their work. In this view, pardon is most appropriately used when neither Congress nor the courts have specifically acted, to restore rights after a sentence has been served. Garland Hunt explained how the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles uses pardon to help people leaving prison get “back on track” with jobs and licenses, so that they are less likely to commit another crime.

Albeit institutionally limited, pardon has an important role in signaling the need for law reform. A few judicious commutations of crack sentences may illustrate where change is necessary. Moreover, the pardon power has frequently and profitably been used to check the other branches, and can send a powerful message to the President’s own executive troops. Pardon is a powerful narrative-framing device that helps the president speak to the public about issues of criminal justice. Mark Early spoke to the enduring relevance of the “second chance” narrative, involving opportunity for change and restoration: “Dollars and cents only work to justify pardoning when there is a crisis like there is now, but these themes are very enduring over time.” Jorge Montes pointed out that pardon can change the public conversation entirely, as with the capital commutations in Illinois by Governor Ryan, or President Ford’s pardon of the disgraced President Nixon.

Nancy Gertner noted that “there is no public support for mercy toward prisoners,” so that the argument for a more proactive use of the pardon power must be grounded in considerations of public safety, evidenced-based practices, the effect of long sentences in making communities dysfunctional and ultimately on the crime rate. John Gleeson expressed the hope that the current financial crisis would provide an incentive to reduce prison populations, on the theory that “no crisis should go to waste.”

In addition to institutional and political limitations on the use of clemency, there are functional objections to wholesale pardoning of classes of prisoners. A number of people agreed with Carol Steiker's point that "we can't really expect from clemency the kind of scale that could deal with the problems of over-incarceration." Professor Steiker thought clemency offers two unique opportunities: it allows the executive to act free from judicial or congressional oversight, and it also permits "the occasional, sporadic insulation from ordinary politics that a lame duck executive enjoys at the end of a term."

Yet it was pointed out that the pardon power has been used in the recent past in several states to deal with short-term problems of prison over-crowding, and there is historical precedent for systemic pardoning in the federal system. Marc Miller mentioned the Kennedy drug commutations as well as the Ford and Carter clemency commissions. Mark Noel described how Colorado Governor Ritter is moving aggressively to address cases of elderly prisoners as well as juveniles through clemency commissions. The objection to large-scale pardoning in a determinate system seems to be principled rather than practical.

Most agreed that, with all of its risks and limitations, pardoning remains an important part of the chief executive's job description. Cases of true error aside, when a system of punishment is as inflexible and severe as the federal, there will be cases, and even classes of cases, that present compelling equitable reasons for using it. Doug Berman remarked that just as "the government gets it wrong in lots of other settings, it gets it wrong lots of times in the criminal justice system and we need a robust clemency function to constantly deal with that." Grounds for clemency in individual cases may be present as early as sentencing itself, and remarked upon by the sentencing judge. More frequently, they may arise years later when a prisoner's circumstances have radically changed. Judge McKee described such a situation in these terms:

One time I was meeting with a group of lifers at a maximum security prison in Pennsylvania, and one of them said to me "the sentence that I got of life imprisonment, I got no problems with it, it was fair when I received it." He was 48 years old and he had been sentenced when he was 19. He said "I killed two

people. I deserve to get life imprisonment. That was a fair sentence. The problem is that the person that sentence was imposed upon no longer exists. I am a totally different person. The person that the sentence was imposed upon died probably about four or five years ago and I see that now.” I think that is where clemency comes into play.

Categorical uses of clemency to address problems in law enforcement are more problematic. There have in the recent past been large-scale grants of clemency, in Ohio and Missouri to battered women convicted and sentenced before a defense based on their abuse was recognized in the courts, in Georgia to resident aliens unfairly targeted for deportation, and in Illinois and New Mexico to capital defendants. As noted, some expressed the view that mandatory minimum penalties for crack cocaine present a similarly appropriate subject of systemic clemency. While the theoretically better approach in such situations may be to change the law and to make the change retroactive, deserving cases may languish in the run-up to a new law, and some cases may be omitted from a general rules change. Moreover, decisions about retroactivity may be influenced by institutional considerations (e.g., burden on courts) that are thought to make the president a more appropriate decider. Historically there are examples of clemency being used systemically to override or preempt an unpopular law, such as Wilson’s commutations in liquor law cases, and Kennedy’s commutations in Harrison Act narcotics cases.

Following up on the procedural suggestions for limiting risk in the Barkow and Kobil papers, many agreed with the idea of a clemency commission composed of professionals, independent of the influence of prosecutors in the Justice Department, which would operate with a degree of transparency pursuant to articulated standards, and that could produce reasoned justifications for clemency grants. Such a commission might also be given responsibility for making recommendations to courts pursuant to statutory sentence-reduction authorities that are now the province of the Bureau of Prisons. The pardon boards in Georgia and Connecticut were cited as models of fairness and efficiency in processing large numbers of clemency cases, though both boards have authority to act independent of the state governor. Judges Friedman and Walton said that they had experienced federal pardoning as fundamentally and perhaps necessarily unfair, citing the

Iran-Contra and Scooter Libby cases, which leads them to conclude that a general second look authority might have more legitimacy if placed in the courts.

At the end of an extended discussion about the absence of political will to address the overly harsh federal sentencing system, Al Alschuler suggested that the roundtable make specific recommendations to incoming President Obama about exercising his pardon power:

I hear a lot of talk at this table about all that's wrong with the sentencing system and the corrections system and nobody thinks there is a political will to do anything about it. The best chance may be the President. Could the ABA Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions write a letter to the President recommending the reinvigoration of clemency? It should say that clemency is really messed up. There is a backlog of petitions in the Justice Department and the pardon program is staffed by professional prosecutors. None of the requests are granted. Clemency doesn't exist anymore except for special favors for political friends which is a totally intolerable system. Move it out of the Justice Department. Put it in the White House. Let the President appoint a commission that includes law enforcement people and prosecutors so he has a little bit of cover. Would that do any good? I don't know. If I were president and I had a long agenda of activities and there was political risk in letting people go who might commit other crimes, maybe not. But at least the more letters you write like that, the more cover you give the President in case he's inclined to do something. So I wonder if that couldn't be a concrete agenda item.

Marc Miller recommended that the roundtable urge President Obama to grant one commutation or pardon every day, and that each grant be justified in terms of some general principle:

Even very small numbers could have a huge effect in terms of symbolism and raising a debate, a discussion about the power of pardon and commutation. I would think it would be stunning if the new justice department and the new president found one person a day whose sentence of the 200,000 plus now in the federal system to commute or pardon and to do so by issuing some statement of general principle about each and every one of those commutations or pardons and then for the next days applying to those like case, the same principles, because in part it is the absence of statements of general principles that has given second looks and pardon and commutations in particular such a disreputable name. I think it would lead to healthy debate. If the first 100 pardons or commutations were done carefully, there would be no measurable risk of a bad story appearing down the road.

Several participants introduced a theme that would be explored in the afternoon session: a parole-like early release system need not be inconsistent with a truth-in-sentencing regime if properly explained and tightly administered. Reports on parole systems in Pennsylvania and Virginia indicate that modern paroling systems are functioning with a considerably higher degree of accountability and reliability than in the past. However, no one was prepared to recommend that a routine early release authority resembling parole be brought back to the federal system.

The following “conclusions” do not represent specific recommendations of the roundtable, or even a consensus of its participants. The most that can be said about them is that they are points on which a number of people seemed to agree.

Conclusions:

- The president should use his pardon power more aggressively to reduce prison sentences in cases involving extraordinary circumstances, however defined, though pardon is not a satisfactory substitute for a more routinely available and regularly constituted sentence reduction mechanism.
- Commutation of particular classes of sentences (e.g., crack cocaine mandatory minimums) could send an effective policy message to Congress.
- The President should be urged to review the system for administering the pardon power in the Justice Department, which in recent years has proved inadequate to support a regular and proactive use of the power.
- The usefulness of the pardon power in the federal system would be enhanced if it were administered in a more regular and transparent fashion by an independent expert clemency commission that would operate with a degree of transparency pursuant to articulated standards, and that could produce reasoned justifications for clemency grants.
- The clemency commission could be enlisted to double duty as gatekeeper for the judicial sentence reduction authority in 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i), or to administer retroactive changes in the law or sentencing guidelines.
- The National Governors Association should undertake to educate governors about the various ways that the pardon power can be used as an instrument of government.

II. Existing Federal Sentence Reduction Mechanisms

The central question raised by this series of papers was posed by Jeremy Travis:

Federal law creates a variety of alternatives to be merciful in some way, but there are many reasons to be risk averse in using that authority. How do we ensure that institutions or individuals have incentives to be merciful?

The answer from state correctional officials is that it is easier to sell mercy if it increases public safety and saves money. At least the latter concept seems to have a good bit less relevance in the federal system. Richard Frase noted:

I don't have confidence that determinant sentencing can work in a system that really doesn't care about the budget.

A. Second Look Authorities Available to Federal Prison Officials

The SRA authorizes a court at any time to reduce a term of imprisonment on motion of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) based on “extraordinary and compelling reasons.” See 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i). This statute, which amounts to a judicial clemency authority, is the only provision in the SRA that permits mid-term reduction of a term of imprisonment. However, it is used very little because BOP interprets its gatekeeper function narrowly, invoking the court’s authority only when a prisoner is close to death.⁸ Even impending death may not be sufficient to accomplish a prisoner’s compassionate release: BOP brings back to court fewer than 20 cases each year out of a prison population that now exceeds 200,000.

Mary Price told the story of Michael Mahoney, a man who got one bad break after another from the justice system after he reported the theft of a pistol. Sentenced to 15 years as an “armed career criminal” on the basis of three small drug sales many years before, Mahoney died in prison after a long battle with liver disease, despite recommendations from the sentencing judge and prosecutor, as well as the prison warden,

⁸ Ironically, this authority was originally sought by BOP in the mid-1970s to expedite situations that theretofore had required an application for executive clemency to be submitted to the President through the Office of the Pardon Attorney. See 18 U.S.C. § 4205(g), discussed in *U.S. v. Banks*, 428 F. Supp. 1088, 1089 (E.D. Mich. 1977)(statement of Director of BOP explaining that the new procedure offered the Justice Department a faster means of achieving the desired result.); *U.S. v. Diaco*, 457 F. Supp. 371, 372 (D.N.J., 1978).

that he be allowed to die at home.⁹ Indeed, the sentencing judge wrote to the BOP Director asking him to bring a sentence reduction motion in Mahoney’s case, but got no response. In 2007, after the Sentencing Commission promulgated policy offering a more expansive interpretation of “extraordinary and compelling reasons,” BOP issued regulations reiterating what Steve Sady has dubbed its “death rattle rule,” and stated its unwillingness to modify its policy to comply with the Commission’s policy guidance. Under these circumstances, it is fair to ask whether BOP should remain in a position where it can effectively bar the courthouse door to prisoners with meritorious claims.

Mr. Sady described how BOP’s reluctance to seek extraordinary sentence reduction also informs its administration of routine authorities to consistently produce longer rather than shorter prison sentences.¹⁰ For example, BOP calculates good time credit using a declining balance method, which results in prisoners getting credit for only 12.8% of the total sentence, rather than the 15% specified in the SRA. While courts have refused to invalidate BOP’s method of calculating good time, they have made clear that it is not mandated by statute. Mr. Sady estimated that it has already cost \$913 million in additional prison time, and will cost \$93 million per year going forward based on the current prison population.¹¹ One of the proposals discussed by the roundtable would make available to BOP additional good time credit that could be earned by prisoners for program participation.

BOP has also failed to fully implement authorities that provide for sentence reduction for successful program participation, including its in-patient drug treatment program, and it unilaterally abolished its boot camp program without adequate explanation. It has also failed to fully use its authority to transfer prisoners to community corrections facilities and home detention at the end of their prison sentences, which could result in a

⁹ Mary Price, *A Case for Compassion*, __ FSR__

¹⁰ Stephen R. Sady & Lynn Deffebach, *Second Look Resentencing under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c) as an Example of Bureau of Prisons Policies that Result in Over-Incarceration*, __ FSR__

¹¹ Sady states that BOP’s rules on sentence computation create *de facto* consecutive sentences despite state judgments providing that the time should run concurrently, fail to provide good time against the concurrent part of sentences where the time was served before the imposition of sentence, and institute dead time by refusing to credit time in administrative detention in immigration cases, all resulting in longer prison sentences and greater expense to the government.

substantial savings and earlier re-entry to the community. Nora Demleitner described how BOP's policies add to the time non-citizen prisoners spend in federal prison by disqualifying them from eligibility for a variety of programs, including the in-patient drug treatment program, without regard to whether they will be automatically deported as aggravated felons.¹²

Roundtable discussion focused on the fact that incentives in the federal sentencing and correctional system go all the wrong way, against mercy and in favor of punishment. Prisoners have no incentive to improve themselves in prison since they have no hope of earning good time or gaining early release on parole. Corrections officials have no incentive to exercise their discretion to make a potentially career-ending early release decision, just as executive officials all the way up to the president have no incentive to be merciful. Justice system agencies and professionals (including judges) all have become increasingly prosecutorial in outlook. Because BOP is located in the Justice Department, it is unduly influenced by prosecutors' agenda and attitudes.

Reluctance to take risk affects BOP willingness to implement policies that would prefer or appear to prefer some prisoners over others. Thus, for example, BOP has no incentive to process non-citizen paperwork for treaty transfer because this might be interpreted as preferring non-citizens over citizens. Aversion to risk sometimes goes to extremes: until last year, women in federal prison were shackled during labor. BOP has assumed too much authority to bar prisoners from court and effectively decide their claim under the sentence reduction statute, as Michael Mahoney's case demonstrates. It was generally agreed that it would be helpful to substitute in the gatekeeper role an entity with less institutional incentive to deny sentence reduction requests, perhaps the clemency commission suggested earlier in the day. Several participants recommended that the new administration appoint new BOP leadership to review policies affecting sentence length and to set a new tone.

¹² Nora V. Demleitner, *Terms of Imprisonment: Treating the Non-Citizen Offender Equally*, __ FSR__.

BOP was not without its defenders at the roundtable. For example, Reggie Walton pointed out that BOP has had a hard time finding adequate halfway house space because of resistance from the community. For example, BOP has been unable to open a federal halfway house in Northern Virginia, so that people who by rights ought to go there for reentry placement all go to the District of Columbia

Budgetary considerations also exercise an important braking influence on excessive sentences in state systems. Richard Frase noted that

One of the things that make determinant sentencing work in the states is that corrections budgets are a very big part of state budgets, which has led states with determinant sentencing systems to use impact assessment tools to lessen the use of unnecessarily severe sentences. In the federal system the corrections budget amounts to a rounding error. It's a no-brainer for Congress to be tough on crime and not worry about adding another decimal point to the Federal deficit. And I think that's still true in the current fiscal crisis. So I don't have confidence that determinant sentencing can work in a system that really doesn't care about the budget.

John Gleeson urged that even for the federal system “there is a very powerful fiscal argument to be made and now is as good a time as any for that to be made.”

Experience in many state corrections systems has been quite different. Garland Hunt (Georgia) and Dora Schriro (Arizona) both described the growing reliance of state correctional officials on risk assessment tools and “evidence-based practices” to prepare prisoners for release from the moment they enter the system. They also noted that a change in culture is taking place in state systems under pressure of budget constraints. Mary Price remarked that the advocacy community could do a better job of emphasizing the public safety aspect of second look mechanisms like earned good time, drug treatment, and boot camp programs. Federal prosecutors must be engaged in the reentry discussion in the way that state prosecutors have been, and must be persuaded that it is in their interest to move people out of prison (or, in the case of non-citizens, out of the country) sooner, or keep them out altogether. It is easier to sell mercy if it increases public safety and saves money.

As previously noted, the following “conclusions” do not represent specific recommendations of the roundtable but are points with which a number of people seemed to agree.

Conclusions:

- The Attorney General should establish an alternative gatekeeper to decide which cases should be brought to the attention of court for possible sentence reduction under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i), and limit BOP’s role to filing the motion in court.
- BOP should modify its calculation of good time to give prisoners credit for a full 15% of their sentence.
- BOP should maximize its use of routine sentence reduction mechanisms, and give full credit for participation in drug treatment and other programs.
- BOP should restore its boot camp program.
- BOP should reinstate its pre-2002 policy of allowing defendants to serve short sentences in the community. It should administer its pre-release policies to ensure that prisoners spend at least a full year in a community placement or home detention at the conclusion of their sentences.
- BOP should not discriminate against non-citizen prisoners in eligibility for drug treatment and other programming that may result in a reduction in prison time, or in eligibility for community corrections placement, unless security considerations dictate otherwise, as determined on a case-by-case basis.
- The Administration should seek legislation to restore the former system of good-time allowances toward the satisfaction of federal prison terms and related purposes through the adoption of a work incentive program whereby federal inmates would receive good-time credit for full-time employment in prison. .

B. Retroactive Application of Changes in the Law

Doug Berman argues¹³ that a preference for harsh prison sentences is built into the DNA of guideline sentencing: “what has really defined the determinate sentencing era is a collective determination to make sure not a single person ever gets punished too lightly.” What Hamilton described in Federalist 74 as the “necessary severity” of all punishment systems is what makes “easy access” to a safety valve essential:

The reason why second look mechanisms are so important is because we can expect, we should expect, first looks to be dysfunctionally harsh. That’s why a parole system was included in modern imprisonment systems, and why the Framers included a pardon power in our founding document.

Searching out and fixing guidelines that are flawed due to unjust and/or ineffective severity should be a priority for the Sentencing Commission:

The realities of modern mass incarceration — combined with my view that our nation’s historic commitment to protecting individual liberty and limiting government power should prompt extreme concerns about excessive terms of imprisonment — lead to the conclusions (1) that unduly harsh guidelines are the type of broken guidelines now most in need of fixing, and (2) that sentencing commissions now need to become persistently proactive in fixing broken harsh guidelines and in making sure fixed guidelines benefit as many individuals as possible. . . .

Guidelines that are too harsh can be readily identified by judicial departure and variance patterns, and by the Commission’s own studies.

When broken guidelines are fixed, “[p]rinciples of equal justice and sentencing parsimony both strongly suggest that, as a general rule, not only future defendants but also past defendants ought to get the benefit of any and all guideline fixes.” Even as large a retroactivity exercise as the changes to the crack guidelines, which affected more than 10% of the federal prison population, was made surprisingly easy by careful preparation by the Sentencing Commission and practitioners in addressing public safety

¹³ Douglas A. Berman, *Exploring the Theory, Policy and Practice of Fixing Broken Sentencing Guidelines*, ___ FSR ___

and administrative concerns. A number of roundtable participants expressed satisfaction that the chaos in the courts and community predicted by the Attorney General did not come to pass.

Conclusion:

- The Sentencing Commission should make it a priority to search out and amend guidelines that are flawed due to unjust and/or ineffective harshness, and should make all such changes retroactive.

C. Repatriation of Non-Citizen Prisoners

Sylvia Royce identified a number of institutional reasons for the limited use of treaty transfers to reduce the enormous number of non-citizens – upwards of 50,000 -- in federal prison.¹⁴ Among other things, transfer is often opposed by prosecutors based on the seriousness of the offense, and the BOP bureaucracy has no incentive to facilitate the application process. While a substantial number of transfers would free up prison resources for the benefit of citizen prisoners, this would also likely result in closing some BOP facilities and possibly even putting some BOP staff out of work.

Two thirds of foreign inmates in BOP custody are from Mexico, and transfer at a very low rate because Mexico does not want to take them back. A substantial number are from countries like Colombia and Cuba with whom we have no treaty relationship. Thus improving treaty transfers would not greatly reduce the numbers of foreign inmates in federal prison. The transfer program could, however, repatriate perhaps 4% to 7% of the federal prison population if the Justice Department had the will to do it. The necessary bureaucracy is in place and for the most part we would have the cooperation of our treaty partners. Like many of the other sentence reduction authorities discussed in this report, there is no need for a change in the law, only a more proactive approach by those responsible for executing it.

¹⁴ Sylvia Royce, *International Prisoner Transfer*, __ FSR __.

There is an additional authority for repatriating non-citizen prisoners that has not been used since its enactment in 1996. Under 8 U.S.C. § 1213(a)(4)(B), the Attorney General and the states are authorized to deport non-citizens convicted of an eligible non-violent offense prior to the completion of their term of imprisonment. While a number of states have already taken advantage of this authority, the Department of Justice has not issued regulations to implement this authority for federal prisoners and no federal prisoner has been granted this early release. In addition, for federal prisoners the number of eligible non-violent offenses is fairly limited, and does not include drug offenses.

Conclusion:

- The Attorney General should take steps to facilitate the repatriation of non-citizens in federal prison who are eligible for treaty transfer, or who are eligible for reduction of sentence pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(4)(B).
- Congress should give the Attorney General the same authority to deport non-citizen prisoners under 8 U.S.C. § 1213(a)(4)(B) as is available to the states by broadening the list of eligible offenses.

Justice Kennedy Joins the Roundtable

Justice Kennedy joined the Roundtable and spoke about his expectation that the cost of incarceration may help reduce prison sentences:

Sometimes you have to use an economic calculus to inspire human compassion. But I'll take an enlightened and humanitarian view from wherever I can get it. And the cost of keeping prisoners is something that gets attention. If people do the right thing for an odd reason, fine. I'll take it.

He suggested that it is important to present sentence reduction issues in an innovative way to appeal to the public. Greater use of the pardon power could be encouraged by insulating the pardoner by commission and by preparing prisoners for reentry. He praised the reentry courts now operating in a number of federal districts, and suggested that providing work release opportunities to prisoners could be an effective way of shortening prison terms while also saving costs of incarceration. He expressed surprise that we do not repatriate prisoners to countries in whose prison systems we have

confidence, such as those in European countries. Reprising a theme of his 2003 ABA speech, he noted that the medical profession seems to be more concerned about life behind bars than lawyers and judges.

III. Proposals for Systemic Reform

A. The Model Penal Code/Sentencing Proposal

Richard Frase described the work underway in the American Law Institute to revise the sentencing articles of the Model Penal Code.¹⁵ He reported that the current ALI draft is based on principles of determinacy but now contains four sentence modification procedures: good time credit administered by prison authorities; early release for age or infirmity, also controlled by prison authorities, though with a role for the court; a 15-year review by the sentencing court based on fundamental change in a prisoner's circumstances; and retroactive application of guidelines changes, involving a resentencing by the court. The draft also assumes a vigorous role for executive clemency, making a total of five different second look provisions.

In the current draft, the provision for good time is an automatic 15% credit against the sentence that can be lost for misconduct, though earlier drafts of the provided for more credit that could be earned. (The original Model Penal Code provided for as much as 40% good time credit, consisting of 20% to be lost for bad conduct, and 20% for "meritorious conduct."). There have been proposals to broaden the age/infirmity provision to cover at least as much ground as the federal sentence reduction provision in 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i), so that it would serve as a general "extraordinary circumstances" provision available at any time after imposition of sentence. There has also some concern about the department of corrections serving as gatekeeper, in light of the disincentives for that agency to take a proactive role in reducing prison sentences. The provision giving retroactive effect to guidelines changes evidently does not apply to non-guideline changes in the law.

¹⁵ Richard S. Frase, *The Proposed Model Penal Code Revisions* __FSR__

The provision that has been most controversial in the ALI draft is the one permitting prisoners to return to court after 15 years to seek release based on a fundamental change in their circumstances since sentencing. Judge McKee recalled that it was Michael Tonry who spoke in favor of having some opportunity for reconsideration of long sentences at the 2007 meeting of the Advisers, where the idea of a second look originated:

We can't lose sight of the fact that when you imprison somebody for 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, there's a human toll that should not be ignored in the process. And in fact when you put somebody in jail for that length of time, you take away all hope. And out of that a great despair arises.

As the roundtable discussed this provision, some were concerned that having a generally available back-end release provision will reduce the incentive to impose reasonable sentences at the front end. Making a 15-year review routinely available may pose an unacceptable burden on courts and counsel, though it will apply only to a small number of people (those sentenced to more than 18 years in prison), and only on a one-shot basis. (Presumably later petitions for early release would be handled either through the age/infirmity provision or through clemency.) One federal trial judge said he thought the 15-year review provision was unrealistic: "We can't remember individual defendants, and hauling them to court so many years later for the necessary full evidentiary hearings is impractical."

In defense of the 15-year review in the ALI draft, Professor Frase noted that the concept of a second look originated with the Advisers, and the reporter was not given extensive guidance about how it should be implemented. Because few jurisdictions have well-developed sentence reduction mechanisms other than clemency or parole, the reporter had to patch together a hybrid mechanism that may benefit from further refinement.

Dora Schriro recommended, based upon her experience in managing several state corrections systems, that the ALI draft make provision for at least some earned good time

credit in addition to the 15% “bad time” in the existing draft, to give prisoners an incentive to participate in programming and generally to have some degree of control over how long they stay in prison. Almost all state sentencing systems include at least some way that most prisoners can earn credit for working and for participating in educational and treatment programs. Good time systems can be managed so as to minimize manipulation by prisoners and maximize rehabilitative effect, particularly with the new concern about preparing prisoners for returning to the community from the moment they arrive in prison. Prison officials know a lot more now about what works to reduce the likelihood of recidivism than they did thirty years ago, and they know that encouraging program participation is an important piece of a reentry strategy.

Judge Wald suggested that an effort should be made to classify the various situations to which each of the five second look provisions would apply. In addition to the routine availability of earned good time, there are a variety of post-sentence circumstances that may warrant sentence reduction (“changes in the offender like age and ill health or family circumstance, the offender’s post sentencing meritorious acts, changes in the victim and the community, changes in societal views of the crime, or changes in sentencing rules”). If the age/infirmity provision were broadened to cover additional circumstances warranting sentence reduction, the principal difference between that and the 15-year provision might then only be procedural, relating to how much a prisoner would have to show, and to whom, before getting his case considered by the court. It is not clear how the substantive standard for sentence reduction under these two statutory provisions would differ from the standard for executive clemency.

Steve Saltzburg and others expressed concern that that the ALI draft is “a generation behind” because it is based on the undesirable inflexibility and “no way out” flaws of determinate sentencing. When there is no possibility of release before expiration of sentence for anyone, corrections systems stop trying to correct and just warehouse. It should be possible to have a “somewhat determinant” system that has a parole-like mechanism built in, but avoids the entitlement approach that discredited indeterminate

systems. It may be preferable to assign the back-end decision-making role to an administrative entity similar to the clemency board discussed in the morning session.

Nancy Gertner pointed out that the ALI draft, like the 1984 Act, ascribes too much importance to institutions. It assumes the worst about parole boards, and is unduly optimistic about the ability of any sentencing commission, no matter how able, to avoid the need for second looks. If the architects of determinate sentencing wanted a more data-driven approach to sentencing, she is not sure they got it in the federal guidelines. Moreover, experience in the states that began with exemplary guidelines has shown the distorting influence of the legislative override. And, even with good guidelines, there will still be mistakes made at the front end. Apart from mistakes, why should someone wait 15 years to have their changed circumstances considered, and why should they only have one shot at it? As to the age/infirmity provision, experience under the federal sentence reduction statute suggests that a corrections department is not institutionally suited to be the gatekeeper for second look provisions. Not only are corrections officials likely to be risk averse, they also don't have relevant information to decide cases where changed circumstances don't involve issues like a prisoner's health. Increasingly states like Pennsylvania are experimenting with systems that combine aspects of determinate and indeterminate systems.

Jeremy Travis gave an example from his own experience that goes to the desirability of having a person come back to the sentencing judge for a second look:

When I was the director of NIJ, we established a reentry court in Hamilton County, Ohio. The judge there used a little known provision of the Ohio sentencing statute that allowed the judge to reopen the original sentence. He would say to a defendant as he was sentencing him, "I am taking your presentence report and translating it into a set of things that you are to do while you are incarcerated. I have a deal with the corrections and rehabilitation department that those four things you have to work on, you're going to get those programs while you're away. You are entitled by law to petition to come back before me after some period of time, some percentage of your sentence, and we'll see how you're doing. If you're doing well, I'm going to release you into my reentry court."

So here you have one judge, a sentencing judge, sending all those messages to the defendant in front of him: "Here are the things we as a society expect you

to do.” So it is not as Justice Kennedy said, that we wash our hands. We actually care about what happens in prison.

Reggie Wilkinson remarked that “you would be proud of that court today. It is amazing what their recidivism rate is versus the state recidivism rate.” Travis conceded that such a proposal may not be realistic in most jurisdictions, in light of judicial resource issues.

Judges Wald and Friedman reported that the ALI Council had recently voted to recommend in favor of the 15-year review provision (except for life sentences), as well as a more expanded “extraordinary circumstances” provision similar to the one in 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A)(i). However, several questions have been left open relating to the standards and procedures applicable under each of the five headings, pending redrafting by the reporter and discussion by the Annual Meeting in May. The roundtable proposed the following questions for consideration by the reporter:

1. **Standard:** Can a different standard be identified for each of the five types of sentence reduction contemplated by the ALI draft? Is there a substantive difference between the standards applicable to the 15-year review provision and the compassionate release provision (“fundamental change” v. “extraordinary circumstances”), or is the main difference in procedural entitlement?
2. **Who Decides?** Should there be a gatekeeper or alternative decision-maker (ALJ or commission) for prisoner petitions at the 15-year mark, to lighten the burden on courts and counsel? Should corrections remain as the gatekeeper for prisoner petitions under the “extraordinary circumstances” provision, or should a similar alternative decision-making structure be established?
3. **Good Time Credit:** Consider adding an additional 15% good time credit to be earned for participation in work and other rehabilitative activities, as in the current Model Penal Code, to give prison authorities tools to encourage participation in reentry programming.
4. **Retroactive Changes in Guidelines:** Consider whether the provision in the ALI draft that authorizes retroactive application of guidelines changes should be extended to deal with changes in the law.

B. Modified Indeterminate Sentencing: The Pennsylvania Model

Mark Bergstrom¹⁶ reported on the “indeterminate structured sentencing” of the Pennsylvania system, where guidelines developed by an expert body limit discretion not just in imposing the sentence, but also in making the decision to parole. Issues that led to the abolition of parole were absence of standards to guide discretion and lack of transparency, both of which are remedied by placing the standard-setting function for front- and back-end sentencing decisions in the same expert body. The Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission is now responsible for drafting both sentencing guidelines and parole guidelines using the same evidence-based risk assessment tools, which coordinates front- and back-end decision-making, also provides a degree of insulation for decision-makers in case a particular parole decision proves controversial. Similar guidelines could be used to inform clemency decisions. There may not be a big difference as a practical matter between determinate and indeterminate systems: presumptive parole that is not an entitlement but depends upon behavioral change and program participation is just another way of looking at a good time system.

Mr. Bergstrom explained that while different institutional concerns inform the sentencing decision at the front and back ends, they should be coordinated. Thus, for example, while a release decision should concern itself with risk to the community, it should also consider the more general purposes of sentencing that apply at the front end.

Garland Hunt of the Georgia Board described how the parole guidelines work in Georgia, and how they have hammered out a system that is accepted by the courts and the prosecutors. As current chair of the Association of Paroling Authorities International he is working with parole boards across the country to develop guidelines and procedures to

¹⁶ Mark Bergstrom & Stephen Chanenson, *The Next Era of Sentencing Reform Revisited*, ___ FSR__.

make parole decision-making more consistent, transparent and reliable. Jeremy Travis responds that the reforms being introduced by state parole boards suggest that

sentencing happens at many places, at the front end, at the middle and the back end, and that the parole board is a part of the sentencing continuum. So you're responding to critiques of the parole boards in ways that the states were responding when they set up sentencing commissions. Aiming to reduce disparity, develop guidelines, use risk factors, and have upward or downward departures. It feels to me like parole boards are becoming like sentencing commissions.

Rick Kern of the Virginia Parole Board described the geriatric release provision enacted at the time parole was abolished in that state, which is predicated on the criminological truth that people age out committing crimes. In Virginia, prisoners are eligible for geriatric release at age 60 after 10 years in prison, or at 65 after 5 years. Problem is that the decision-making agency is the old parole board kept around for this residual purpose, and it has denied 498 out of 500 cases based on the seriousness of the offence. Virginia is now considering setting up a separate board to handle geriatric release cases, since the parole board is evidently not willing to apply "evidence-based standards" to assess risk. Others comment that when parole boards base decisions on seriousness of the offense, as many do, they are not performing a useful second look function.

Ron Wright commented that if you combined a front- and back-end guidelines system like the one in Pennsylvania with a package of executive clemency mechanisms, you could "scale it up" to start addressing the size of the incarceration problem in a way that clemency alone could not. On the other hand, if the second look is not a repeat of the first one, so that you would be inclined to get different answers on the second look than on the first look, why would you want the same body generating the rules for the first and second looks? "Wouldn't you want a different set of rule makers to create second look rules if you want them to give you a different look?"

The first look is likely to be the most ambitious. It is the moment right after the crime when we're most upset about the crime and we are most likely to be most committed to a state response to the crime at that point. So the second look

should be the more considered and possibly a more modest view of the role of state power here. And if that is so, perhaps parole boards with a lot of history in the state might not be the best place to turn for that second look if you're really aiming to get a second look that is less ambitious and more modest about the reach of state power than the first look was.

Al Alschuler also noted the advantage of having a routine second look mechanism at the back end:

The back end has a lot of advantages over front end sentencing. It's not done in hot blood. We have Enron, white collar crime becomes the crime du jour as we were talking about that this morning. We pass new legislation, and give executives, non-violent first time offenders 30 year-sentences. Before they finish their 30 year sentence, somebody ought to take a look at it. The back end agency is a jurisdiction-wide agency so it is in a much better position to eliminate disparities than sending it back to the sentencing judge. Dick Frase says sentencing is a judicial function, but it has never been an exclusively judicial function. The back end is better able to take account of institutional needs. While the sentencing commission can come up with prison impact statements and so forth, the back end can look at how crowded the prisons are now and if they are overcrowded can pick the most deserving offenders and the pity committee can let them go. And that is something that we somehow need to reinstitute in the criminal justice system.

Marc Miller noted that the Pennsylvania experiment is very important because it begins to address the different perceptions of sentencing commissions and their expertise versus parole boards.

It gives us a ground for talking in new and fresh terms about the systematic broad-scale second look function. I think there's a huge advantages to having the same institution thinking about the same data even if they have to think with different hats or talk about different purposes or asses the relevance over time of risk assessments too early or late. As scholars and judges and practitioners it is worth reminding ourselves that in 1973 when there was this sustained critique of the parole function, one that we still live with, that there were then 20,000 people in the state prison in California, and 20,000 in the federal prison system. Judge Frankel wrote his critique about indeterminacy and this fear of unequal sentences at a time when the level of imprisonment was much different. We also knew much less. It is not that we should ignore history at all – and I wonder what Marvin Frankel or Norval Morris would be saying about our discussion of reviving a systematic parole function if they were here -- but we didn't know as much about the varieties of discretion. We had much, much less knowledge about sentencing than we have today.

Doug Berman commented that “we shouldn’t have that much faith in institutions” to produce justice, because over time they develop “a variety of co-option dynamics” that reinforce a tendency to minimize risk:

We don’t fully appreciate how the pro-incarceration forces will always co-opt, how the fear of mistake will always lead to longer terms, and how the political dynamic will reinforce all of that timidity -- whether it’s the timidity of the sentencing commission doing reductive changes, or the timidity of a chief executive or a parole board or the Bureau of Prisons not wanting to make a release decision.

In the sentencing context we don’t have the functional equivalent of a jury that “checks the institutional players who may all be tilted towards the infliction of state power on the individual, and then gets to go home.”

Bobby Vassar observed that the imperfections and inconsistencies at every stage of the criminal justice system are accounted for by having other actors come along at the next stage and make another decision, to try to correct the errors of the stages that preceded it. The parole board was one of many places to correct systemic errors. For some reason, we have decided that we can stop with the sentence, that no one needs to review it, and that the prisoner gets no chance to show that the sentence originally imposed was a mistake in some normative sense:

I’m convinced that the system I’d like to see is the one I’d like to be sentenced under and judged under. If I committed a crime and were convicted, I’d want a chance to show that I’m worth more than whatever a particular point in time suggests about an action I’ve taken, such as at sentencing. We’re talking about individuals, so I don’t know why we feel it so necessary to find some scientific basis for whatever we’re trying to do. I’m just not that impressed by it. I’d rather concede that the system’s imperfect, that people will sometimes make terrible decisions and abuse their discretion, and give myself a chance to show that I’m worthy of whatever that system should give. So rather than ask whether we should have routine access to second look consideration, I’d ask whether we should have routine access to a better look. I think there should be something we’re trying to accomplish other than getting the sentence perfectly right to begin with, in the hope that we can walk away and say we’re done.

Justice Kennedy had these final observations:

Systems must have mechanisms for change. And the corrections system must have the capacity to change through learning. It must learn about the dangers of

mandatory minimums. It must learn about the overemphasis placed on heavy sentencing for white collar crimes. We must remember also that the prisoner learns. Ideally the prisoner learns who he is and becomes a different and better person. There is nothing wrong with giving some recognition in the retribution aspect of sentencing to a judgment that a crime deserves 30 years. But whether that should be the sentence imposed is quite a different matter.

Recommendations from Roundtable Participants:

At the conclusion of the afternoon, Jeremy Travis asked roundtable participants to put down on paper recommendations they would each like to make to the new administration and to the new Congress, ideas they have for a criminal justice agenda in the states and in professional organizations, and suggestions for influencing the public conversation about these issues. Without attribution, and with the understanding that these are individual recommendations only, here is what the group came up with.

Recommendations to the President

1. Clemency

- Signal a change in attitude toward your pardoning responsibilities, that you expect pardoning to be an ongoing regular process, and that you expect to receive well-researched recommendations about the cases of ordinary people.
- Identify particular classes of cases that would be suitable for clemency, including crack sentences and immigration cases.
- Direct the Attorney General to look carefully at the way the pardon process has been working of late to determine if it is serving the president (as opposed to prosecutors).
- Establish an independent body to develop criteria for commutations and pardons, and to make recommendations on particular clemency cases, which should be insulated as much as possible from the influence of politics and prosecutors.
- Set an example for state governors in exercising the power of clemency, and help them understand that it is not soft on crime but a tool to control population costs and a number of other things.
- Direct the Attorney General to make a careful assessment of the federal prison population to determine who might qualify for release under existing law without jeopardizing public safety, based on age or infirmity, or under the new sentencing guidelines relating to sentence reduction.

2. Reentry

- Create a position of “reentry czar” and appoint someone who has a criminal record to serve in that role.
- Direct a study of the harm that is done to our society by having such a large number of people in prison, including the destruction of community and loss of people who could be productive if some investment were made in them. As long as we are talking about investing in transportation infrastructure, highways and bridges and transit, we could invest some of that money into human infrastructure.

- Direct the Secretary of State to do an assessment of how our sentencing practices and the large number of people in prison harms us on the international stage.
- Direct Attorney General to consider how to use the bipartisan approach that was successful in the Second Chance Act to address second look issues; and to work with professional organizations at the state level like the National Governors Association, National Association of Attorney Generals, National Conference of State Legislatures.

Recommendations to the Attorney General

- Appoint a forward-looking Director of the Bureau of Prisons.
- Direct BOP to fully implement the ameliorative statutes that already exist to significantly reduce the federal prison population overnight
- Redefine the role of the prosecutor. Rescind directive to always ask for maximum sentence, insist on pleading to the top count of the indictment. Stop practice of appeal waivers.
- Direct prosecutors to consider reentry issues in charging decisions and sentencing recommendations.
- Facilitate repatriation of the 27 percent of federal prisoners who are non-US nationals, through treaty transfer and 8 U.S.C. § 1231(a)(4)(B).
- Convene a three-branch conference like the one AG Reno convened, including organizations like the National Governors Association.
- Reestablish the attorney general's working group of representatives of professional organizations convened by Attorney General Meese, the American Bar Association criminal justice section, and NAAG, to discuss how to allocate federal and state responsibility, how to cooperate, what is good and bad about what is going on.
- Support sentencing and corrections research in the states with a real focus on evidence-based practices.
- Commission a study on effects of incarceration on family and community

Recommendations to Congress

- Repeal mandatory minimum sentences and revisit the abolition of parole and earned good time.
- Restore the former system of good-time allowances toward the satisfaction of federal prison terms to permit federal prisoners to receive good-time credit for full-time employment in prison.
- Fund the Second Chance Act and restore Pell grants to prisoners.
- Consider whether BOP should remain as gatekeeper for the extraordinary sentence reduction provision, and whether prisoners who have been incarcerated for a certain number of years should be permitted to file their own motion.
- Put a defender representative on the Sentencing Commission with the same stature as the Department of Justice ex-officio.

- Eliminate the so-called 25% rule in the SRA that compels the large number of levels of the guidelines, which would free the commission to create a guideline system with broader ranges that would work more like those in the states.
- Direct the Department of Justice and the Sentencing Commission to publish prison impact statements.
- Give the Attorney General the same authority to deport non-citizen prisoners under 8 U.S.C. § 1213(a)(4)(B) as is available to the states, by broadening the list of eligible offenses.
- Identify five NGOs that would make a grant proposal for reentry programs that are staffed in large part by service sector people that do not know much about the criminal justice system. This would build a constituency nationwide for people who take an interest in the justice system and are learning about its failures and its deficiencies.

Recommendations to the Judiciary

- Encourage judges to look at the sentencing process not just in terms of the in/out decision but in terms of the reentry decision.
- Establish reentry courts to avoid returns to prison.

Recommendations to the Sentencing Commission

- Develop evidence-based practices, what works, what doesn't to reduce risk of recidivism.
- Expand opportunities for probation sentences.
- Determine what the public wants in sentencing and use this information to guide guidelines decisions (20-year sentences for crack offenders or for non-violent drug offenders).

Recommendations to the American Law Institute

- Take a second look at the rejection of discretionary parole in the MPC draft.
- Review five second look mechanisms to assign specific functions, reconsider one-shot nature of 15-year review provision, facilitate reduction of sentences for changed circumstances and reconsider gatekeeper role for corrections.
- Extend provision on retroactive guidelines changes to apply to changes in the law.
- Provide for earned good time in addition to statutory "bad time."

Recommendation to the National Governors Association

- The National Governors Association should undertake to educate governors in the various ways the pardon power can be used as an instrument of government.

Participants in the Roundtable

Moderator:

Jeremy Travis, President, John Jay College

Presenters

Rachel E. Barkow, Professor, NYU Law School

Mark H. Bergstrom, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission

Douglas A. Berman, Professor, Ohio State Law School

Nora V. Demleitner, Dean, Hofstra Law School

Richard S. Frase, Professor University of Minnesota Law School

Daniel T. Kobil, Professor, Capital Law School

Margaret Colgate Love, Director ABA Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions

Mary Price, Vice President and General Counsel, FAMM

Sylvia Royce, private practitioner

Stephen R. Sady, Deputy Federal Defender, District of Oregon

Commentators:

Lynn Adelman, U.S. District Judge, WDVI

Albert W. Alschuler, Professor, Northwestern Law School

Mark Earley, President, Prison Fellowship

Paul L. Friedman, U.S. District Judge, DDC

Nancy Gertner, U.S. District Judge, DMA

John Gleeson, U.S. District Judge, EDNY

Garland R. Hunt, Member, Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole

Rick Kern, Executive Director, Virginia Sentencing Commission

Theodore McKee, U.S. Circuit Judge, 3rd Cir.

Marc Miller, Professor, U. of Arizona Law School

Cranston Mitchell, Member, U.S. Parole Commission

Jorge Montes, Chair, Illinois Prisoner Review Board

Mark Noel, Dir. for Exec Clemency, Colorado

Stephen A. Saltzburg, Professor George Washington U Law

Dora Schriro, Director, AZ Department of Corrections

John Steer, Allenbaugh Samini, LLP

Carol Steiker, Professor, Harvard Law School

Kate Stith-Cabranes, Professor, Yale Law School

Patricia M. Wald, U.S. Circuit Judge, D.C. Cir. (ret).

Reggie B. Walton, U.S. District Judge, DDC

Reggie Wilkinson, former Director, Ohio Department of Correction

Ronald Wright, Professor, Wake Forest Law School