



January 11, 2017

Law and Order

President-elect Donald J. Trump is calling for the return of the conservative enforcement of Law and Order. We may not need a conservative version of Law and Order, but our community DOES need some order. We all were born with free will and with the power to act without the constraint of necessity or fate. The ability to act at one's own discretion means that we all have the personal responsibility to try to do what is right. We should always be reminded that our actions not only affect our own lives but also the lives of our family, friends, and community.

However, conservative policies of Law and Order and President Bill Clinton's 1996 crime bill have destroyed, and continues to destroy, many lives in our country. Policies that demand strict uniform criminal penalties and give no real chance of redeeming one's full liberty has led to 2.24 million prisoners in United States.

The United States has the world's largest prison population. While the U.S. represents only five percent of the world's population, it houses around 25 percent of the world's prisoners. The incarceration rate of the U.S. is also the highest in the world, at 716 per 100,000 of the national population. According to a U.S. Department of Justice report, over 7.2 million people were at that time in prison, on probation, or on parole. That means roughly 1 in every 32 Americans are under some sort of criminal justice system control.

In politics, Law and Order generally refers to demands for a strict criminal justice system with stricter criminal penalties, especially for violent and property crime. These penalties may include longer terms of imprisonment, mandatory sentencing, three-strikes laws, and in some countries or states, capital punishment.

Supporters of Law and Order generally argue that incarceration is the most effective means of crime prevention. Opponents of law and order argue that a system of harsh criminal punishment is ultimately ineffective because it does not address underlying or systemic causes of crime and does not restore justice using restorative justice principles.

Law and Order is a recurring theme in political campaigns around the world. Candidates may exaggerate or even manufacture a problem with law and order, or characterize their opponents as "weak" on the issue, to generate public support. The expression also sometimes carries the implication of arbitrary or unnecessary law enforcement, or excessive use of police powers. We see a strain of Law and Order here in Chicago with some people saying that we should respond to the 762 reported murders in 2016 by increasing police powers and increasing mandatory penalties, rather than using approaches discussed in my column entitled, "What Should We Do?"

Law and Order was a powerful conservative theme in the U.S. in the 1960s, according to Michael W. Flamm. The leading proponents in the late 1960s were Republicans Ronald Reagan (as governor of California) and Richard Nixon (as presidential candidate in 1968). They used it to dissolve a liberal consensus about crime that involved federal court decisions and a pushback against illegal drugs and violent gang activity. White ethnics in northern cities turned against the Democratic party, blaming it for being soft on crime and rioters.

As a resident of the West Side of Chicago and who once fought the criminal justice system for my own liberty, we have faced many personal challenges and many challenges as a nation and we have overcome many challenges in the past only because we have the will to fight and have a vision and mission for a better future.

I will continue to fight to roll back as many laws that hold people back in Illinois, and I will continue to fight any newly proposed unfair and unjust laws that unnecessarily ruin the liberty that we are born to enjoy. Let's work together to reduce crime in our communities and find peaceful solutions for the conflicts we may face.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSK', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District