

# LAW & JUSTICE

## Drug Sentence Disparities Tackled

### Equalizing penalties for powdered v. crack cocaine

(AP) -- The Obama administration has joined a federal judge in urging Congress to end a racial disparity by equalizing prison sentences for dealing and using crack versus powdered cocaine.

"Jails are loaded with people who look like me," U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton, an African-American, told a Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing last week.

Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer said the administration believes Congress' goal "should be to completely eliminate the disparity" between the two forms of cocaine. "A growing number of citizens view it



Judge Reggie Walton

as fundamentally unfair," Breuer testified.

It takes 100 times more powdered cocaine than crack cocaine to trigger the same harsh mandatory minimum sentences.

Sen. Dick Durbin, an Illinois Democrat who chairs the subcommittee, said, "Under current law, mere possession of five grams of crack — the weight of

five packets of sweetener — carries the same sentence as distribution of half a kilogram of powder or 500 packets of sweetener."

Durbin said more than 81 percent of those convicted for crack offenses in 2007 were African-American, although only about 25 percent of crack cocaine users are African Americans.

Congress enacted the disparity during an epidemic of crack cocaine in the 1980s, but the senator said lawmakers erred in assuming that violence would be greater among those using crack.

Breuer said the best way to deal with violence is to severely punish anyone who commits a violent offense, regardless of the drug involved.

"This administration believes our criminal laws should be tough, smart, fair," Breuer said, but also should "promote public trust and confidence in the

criminal justice system."

Walton said, "We were mistaken" to enact the disparity. "There's no greater violence in cases before me."

Testifying on behalf of the Judicial Conference of the United States, the policy-making arm of the federal judiciary, Walton added that jurors have expressed an unwillingness to serve in crack cocaine cases because of the disparity.

President Barack Obama had called for such a change while campaigning for the White House.

Breuer said the government should focus on punishing drug trafficking networks, like the cartels wreaking havoc in Mexico, and those whose crimes include acts of violence.

The Obama administration is also seeking to increase drug treatment, as well as rehabilitation programs for felons after they're released from prison.

## Sojourner Truth Honored at Capitol

### Bronze bust enshrines former slave, leader

(AP) — Michelle Obama says she hopes abolitionist Sojourner Truth would be proud to see a descendent of slaves as America's first black first lady.

Mrs. Obama made the comment April 28 as she helped unveil a bust of Truth, the first black woman to be honored with a statue at the Capitol.

"I am proud to be able to stand here on this day," the first lady told the audience of mostly women.

Truth is a former slave who met with Abraham Lincoln and was an early crusader for women's right to vote and an end to slavery.

Mrs. Obama said her two young daugh-



First lady Michelle Obama honors abolitionist Sojourner Truth during the unveiling of a bust of Truth at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

ters will now be able to "see the face of a woman who looks like them" when they visit the nation's Capitol.

The sculpture will remain on permanent display in the Capitol Visitor Center, called Emancipation Hall in part because slaves helped build the Capitol.

Truth met presidents Lincoln in 1864 and Ulysses S. Grant in 1870, and delivered her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. She tried to vote on two occasions, but was turned away both times. She died in November 1883 at her home in Battle Creek, Mich.

Few minority women are enshrined in the Capitol. There are several statues of American Indian women, but no Asian or Hispanic women, according to Donald Ritchie, a Senate historian.

## Merkley Backs Anti-Hate Crime Law

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., has joined Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., to co-sponsor the Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009.

The bill will enable the Justice Department to assist local authorities in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes by authorizing grants to meet the extraordinary expenses often involved in investigating and prosecuting these cases.

"Hate crimes are not just crimes against individuals, they are crimes targeting entire communities," said Merkley. "They are efforts to exploit and inflame our differences and to deny America's fundamental promise that every person should be treated equally."



Jeff Merkley

At the federal level, the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act empowers the Treasury Department and the Justice Department to increase personnel to better prevent and respond to allegations of hate crimes — crimes that target victims on the basis of their race,

color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

"Senator Kennedy has long been a leader in defending the rights of all Americans, no matter their race, creed, or sexual orientation," said Merkley. "I am proud to join him in supporting legislation to give state and local law enforcement the resources and support they need to prevent and prosecute hate crimes."



Ace Tavern security video shows a man suspected of using a knife to rob the tavern, located at 8868 N.E. Sandy Blvd.

## Tavern Robbery

The Portland Police Bureau, in cooperation with Crimes Stoppers, is asking for your help in solving a tavern robbery caught on tape.

On Tuesday, July 22, 2008, at 1:58 a.m., a lone suspect robbed the Ace Tavern, located at 8868 N. E. Sandy Blvd.

The victim was getting ready to close the bar when the suspect, armed with a knife, approached her and demanded money from the till. The suspect took the money and left on foot eastbound on Northeast Prescott Street.

The suspect has been identified as John Roy Ferguson, 45. Call 503-823-HELP (4357) or leave a tip online at crimestoppersoforegon.com.

## DNA Solves 1976 Murder

The Portland Police Bureau's Cold Case Homicide Unit and the Oregon State Police Crime Laboratory have solved the 1976 murder of Rosa Cinnamon, an 80-year-old woman who was murdered during a robbery of her south-

east Portland apartment.

It was the oldest homicide solved by the Cold Case Unit and the oldest DNA match ever obtained by the crime lab.

At the time of her death, the Medical Examiner's Office determined that Cinnamon had

died from asphyxia due to manual strangulation.

Police said it appears that Warren was living in Cinnamon's neighborhood and did not have any connection to her. Warren forced his way into the victim's residence and murdered her.

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