

## EDITORIALS

# Sentencing fixes need Trump push

**B**ipartisan criminal justice reform has been knocking around the nation's capital for a while. It almost got done in 2015 before sinking in Washington's dysfunction.

But now, unexpectedly, a window has opened to make long-overdue changes. Jeff Sessions, a fierce opponent of those reforms, was fired as attorney general earlier this month. President Donald Trump, previously a foe, reversed his position last week and signaled his support for a bill being developed in the Senate. There is urgency among its sponsors to get it done by year's end. It's time to move it forward.

Principally, the bill would unwind some of the harsh measures of the 1980s and 1990s that led to African-American offenders being incarcerated at much higher rates than white offenders. It's a big improvement over a bill passed earlier in the House of Representatives, which focused primarily on improving prison conditions and making it easier for inmates to re-enter society. The Senate version does that, but it also would allow judges to ignore onerous mandatory minimum sentencing rules for a wider group of nonviolent drug offenders while reducing those minimums from 20 years to 15 years. It would make retroactive a 2010 law that reduced the disparity in sentences for crack and powder-cocaine offenses, which also disproportionately affected black people. It also would ban the restraint of pregnant female inmates with shackles. We wish more of the sentencing changes were retroactive, but on balance the First Step Act is a good step forward.

Supporters range from the conservative Koch brothers to the liberal American Civil Liberties Union. But some hard-line senators are balking, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says the chamber has a lot to get done by the end of December and it's unlikely there will be time to consider the legislation.

Trump can make the difference. He has vacillated before, offering surprising support for immigration reform, for example, only to change his mind again. This time Trump needs to be unwavering, make criminal justice reform a priority, and push all parties to bring home this bill that would start to correct some grievous injustices. Let's get this done, at last.

— *The editorial board*

## Veterans desperate for gov't follow-through

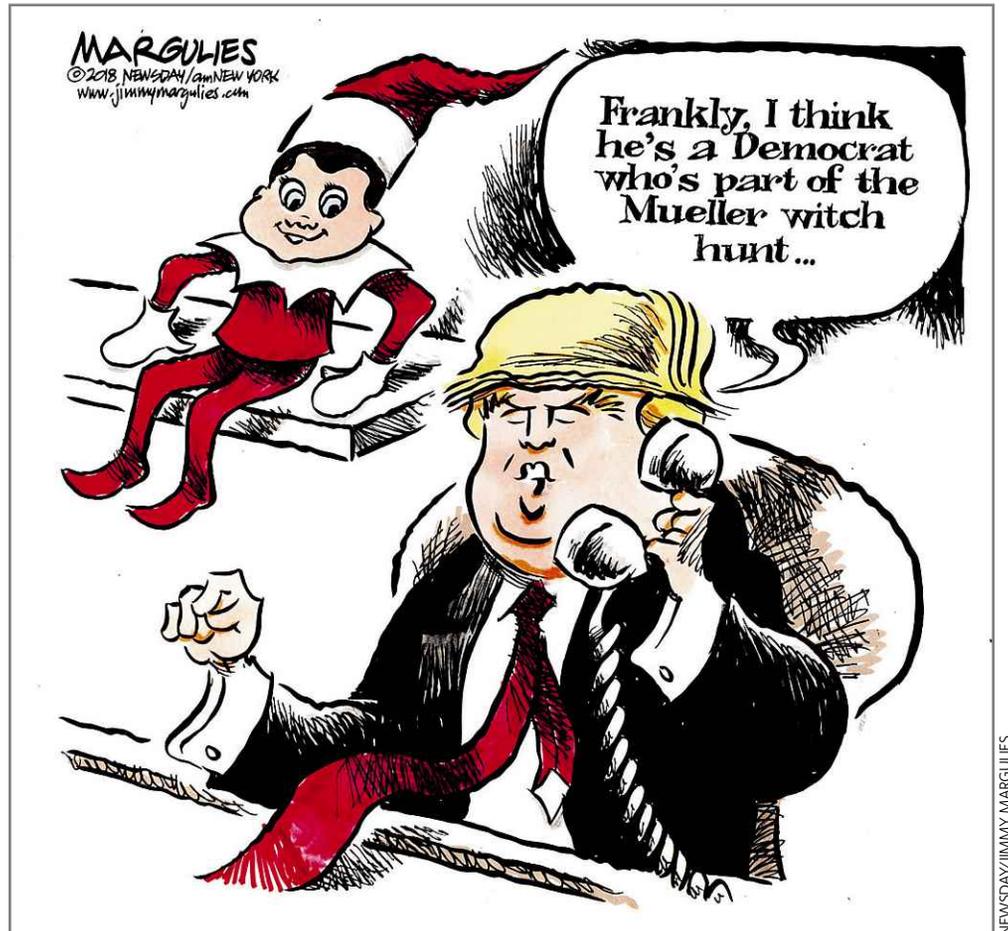
**L**ast year, President Donald Trump and Congress massively expanded education benefits for military veterans, known as the Forever GI Bill. The bill, an update of the original GI Bill that gave more than 8 million World War II veterans an education and living expenses while they studied, was badly needed.

But it wasn't properly handled by the Department of Veterans Affairs, whose 50-year-old computer systems could not process the new claims and rules. One roadblock was a change in how housing allowances are figured, now based on locations of campuses where veterans are studying rather than the main campus of their educational institutions.

But many stipends haven't been paid, and news accounts are full of tales of veterans unable to pay for housing, child care and food. At least 10,000 payouts have been delayed more than 30 days, at least 82,000 were pending earlier this month.

The VA says it has hired more than 200 workers and put employees on mandatory overtime to address the problem, and the number of veterans waiting for checks is down. But as a nation we have made promises to service members that we have not lived up to. We have to do better.

— *The editorial board*



■ **Matt Davies is off. See his cartoons at [newsday.com/matt](http://newsday.com/matt)**

## LETTERS

### Sifting through Amazon HQ2

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo plans to give Amazon \$2.8 billion in incentives, with the vague idea that this will create some imaginary money to trickle down to us peasants ["Amazon HQ2: potential vs. challenges," Editorial, Nov. 14].

I am sure Cuomo would stay clear of a financial adviser who told him gains to his investment were not guaranteed, but would somehow, trickle down to his account. This gent would be booted out of Cuomo's office like a 70-yard punt, but since it is not Cuomo's money, who cares?

The point is, there is no proof that this trickle-down business works. It is the politicians' and big business' way of picking your pockets.

*John J. Mandeville,  
Farmingdale*

■ In your Nov. 18 editorial on Amazon, "Long Island in prime position," you advocated instituting tolls on now-free East River bridges, which would also help the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Let the MTA solve its own problems. I'm sure your tired argument is that more train riders equals less traffic, but it works the other way, too: When more drive to work, the trains are less crowded. Enough about drivers subsidizing the MTA already. I don't see the MTA contributing to road maintenance.

*Joseph Cesare,  
Copiague*

■ What your editorial board wrote about Amazon in Long Island City was right on the button. I would add something that would help: The Hunters Point Avenue Long Island Rail Road and No. 7 subway stations are obsolete sta-

tions that are impossible for many to access, dangerous in winter and unsafe at any time.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority needs to demolish and rebuild the LIRR station, which has a narrow platform widened a bit with bouncy timber that is scary to walk on. Getting to it and out of it are difficult; getting between it and the 7 train stop is even more so.

The MTA could build an enclosed bridge to keep snow out from the concourse level over the tracks to a rebuilt LIRR main platform, with ramps for wheelchairs. The train station also should have escalators and elevators to the street level. The 7 subway station would need escalators and elevators from concourse to the street, and from both platforms to the concourse.

The city Department of Transportation and the MTA also should find a safe place