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## **The 'Mass Incarceration Crisis'**

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In his April 23 Political Diary item ("[Prison Break](#)"), Jason Riley asserts that the Justice Department's clemency initiative caters to "the left's soft-on-crime sentencing policies" at the expense of public safety. In truth, the right and left are working in tandem to roll back the misguided and ineffective criminal justice policies that created today's mass incarceration crisis.

With 5 percent of the world's population, the U.S. has 25 percent of its prisoners. Many of these are nonviolent offenders imprisoned because of draconian sentencing laws that led the prison population to triple since 1980. Today, it's not just libertarians calling for sentencing reform. Fiscal conservatives are shocked by the prison system's immense cost: at an average of \$30,000 a year per prisoner mass incarceration drains money from police, education, and other taxpayer priorities at a time of fiscal crisis for government at all levels. And those on the religious right who support second chances are appalled by a system that locks away nonviolent offenders for decades.

Evidence shows that longer sentences do not make offenders less likely to commit crimes. In fact, putting low-level offenders into prison with more serious offenders can actually cause them to commit more crimes upon release. Expanding clemency will save taxpayer dollars and give deserving men and women a second chance at life outside of a prison cell. These are goals that all Americans, across the political spectrum—including those in communities hit hardest by these overly harsh sentences—should be able to agree on.