PS1 for 7/7/88#DUKAKIS, FURLOUGHS AND RAPISTS

The liberal claque has started yapping again about the so-called ""gender gap.'' That's an alleged phenomenon invented by public opinion pollsters (the same ones whose predictions are so frequently wrong) and popularized by the anti-Reagan, anti-Bush media.

Use of the term in 1984 and 1986 was supposed to translate as ""the majority of women won't vote for Reagan and/or Republicans.'' The term has been revived in 1988 to mean ""the majority of women won't vote for George Bush.''

When women find out about Michael Dukakis' views on criminals versus victims in general and on rapists in particular, it is likely that the gender gap will evaporate in a puff of smoke.

Dukakis is an enthusiastic supporter of the unique Massachusetts prison furlough program. Until the law was changed this year despite Dukakis' objection, Massachusetts was the only state to grant furloughs to first-degree murderers sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.

A furlough is a pass that allows a prisoner to go free for a few days without supervision. This program, largely unknown to the general public, was designed for specific limited purposes, such as to get medical care not available in prison, to attend the funeral of a close relative, or to look for a job during the last few months before a prisoner's scheduled release or parole.

Although a majority of states have furlough programs (California, New York and Illinois do not), nine do not allow furloughs for first-degree murderers at all, and the rest allow a furlough for a first-degree murderer only if and after he has received a commutation or parole. The Massachusetts Legislature had second thoughts about this furlough program and passed a bill in 1976 to deny furloughs to first degree murderers, but Governor Dukakis vetoed it.

William Horton, Jr., was serving a sentence of life imprisonment without parole in a Massachusetts prison after being convicted of robbing a 17-year-old gas station attendant in 1974, brutally stabbing him 19 times, and stuffing his body into a 30-gallon trash can. Horton's prison term was the toughest sentence he could have received since, only a few weeks earlier, Governor Dukakis had vetoed a death penalty bill for Massachusetts.

Horton was given a Massachusetts furlough in June 1986, and he took advantage of the opportunity to escape and leave the state. On April 3, 1987, Horton broke into a Maryland home and terrorized a man and woman for 12 hours. Horton tied up the man, robbed him, pistol-whipped and kicked him, and cut him 22 times across the middle of his body. Horton dragged the woman upstairs, kept her tied up for four hours, and raped her twice.

Maryland found Horton guilty of 13 crimes and sentenced him to two life terms plus 85 years. The sentencing judge stated, ""With all due respect to the citizens of our sister state, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I'm not prepared to take the chance that Mr. Horton might again be furloughed or otherwise released. ... [Horton] now belongs to the state of Maryland.''

A Lawrence, Massachusetts newspaper became interested in the story but was stonewalled by the Dukakis administration's refusal to permit public access to information on the circumstances of Horton's record and furlough. Prison officials said they were protecting prisoners' privacy rights.

The newspaper stories, however, activated the Massachusetts Legislature. At a public hearing, other victims told how other murderers had committed heinous crimes, including rape, while on Massachusetts furloughs.

The public was shocked when a prison official admitted that, in

Massachusetts, a sentence of ""life without parole'' is meaningless. After ten years, a lifer in that state is routinely transferred to minimum security and made eligible for furloughs.

The sister of the murdered gas station attendant then started a petition campaign under the name Citizens Against Unsafe Society (CAUS). When she and other female victims of murderers-on-furlough encountered Governor Dukakis, he warned them that they were ""not going to change my mind.''

The CAUS women set out to gather the 50,525 certified voter signatures needed in order to put the issue on the ballot in a November 1988 referendum, and they succeeded in making the December 1987 deadline. In the face of this voice from the grassroots, the Massachusetts Legislature in April 1988 overwhelmingly passed a bill to prohibit this furlough system.

The issue isn't dead, however, because it's clear that Dukakis only signed the law reluctantly, and he has never apologized to or expressed compassion for the victims of the Massachusetts-murderers-on-furlough. There are 76 convicted criminals (including 10 murderers and 9 rapists) who were released during Dukakis' administration and who are presently missing from furlough and similar programs.