



Back to Stephen Harper's 'tough-on-crime' laws are more misguided than ever

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For 20 years there's been a troubling disconnect between the reality of crime in Canada and people's fear of it. The persistent — though mistaken — view that crime is on the rise has allowed governments to push through ever more "tough-on-crime" laws.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives have taken this to extremes. The omnibus Bill C-10 before the Senate right now will foist enormous and unnecessary costs on taxpayers.

Yet in reality violent crime is down. Property crime is down. Other crimes are down. Crime is at its lowest since 1973.

Finally, people are getting it. An Environics Focus Canada poll released last week show that the number who think crime is on the rise has dropped from 52 per cent to 46 per cent. Moreover 63 per cent think Ottawa's crime-fighting focus should be on prevention.

Too bad Harper isn't listening. The Tories are as obstinate as ever in their desire for harsher sentences, including for young offenders and mandatory minimums for drug crimes. They ignore evidence from the United States that a lock 'em up and throw away the key approach does not reduce crime.

They also seem content to dump the costs of building more prisons onto provincial taxpayers, even if services like health and education suffer. Ontario may face \$1 billion in new costs.

With a \$16 billion deficit, the province is so short on cash that it has scrapped popular programs like the \$150 textbook grant for college and university students. Now it is combing the health budget looking for savings.

As more Canadians awake to declining crime rates, they will become less tolerant of senseless, ideologically driven justice policy and of bids to garner votes by fear-mongering. Provincial deficits and the prospects of cuts to health and education will reinforce that trend.

Canadians might still rank crime as a big concern but it doesn't top health care. Few will thank any government that closes a hospital to pay for a new prison.