



O'NEILL: With criminals in jail, we're all safer

By [Terry O'Neill - The Tri-City News](#)

Published: **April 29, 2011 1:00 AM**

FACE TO FACE: Is 'getting tough on crime' a useful approach for our country?

My colleague on the other side of the page has developed the habit of bashing, blaming or otherwise bandying about the name of the United States as a way of adding some gravity to his arguments.

He's aware of his overuse of the references but will undoubtedly have had to wage an epic battle with his inner Maude Barlow to dissuade himself from dragging the U.S. into today's debate about the Conservative party's law-and-order agenda, which leftists throughout our country regularly denounce as being "American-style." Here's hoping he has been able to bring something fresh to the Face to Face table.

One way or the other, if you believe the critics, Stephen Harper's reforms will waste money by imprisoning too many harmless criminals for sentences that are far too long. The trouble with this line of reasoning is that, in addition to the unpleasant assumption that we should put a price tag on justice, it's based on some selectively cited crime-rate statistics, not on real crimes, real criminals and real victims.

Take, for example, the Harper government's promise to pass legislation to end "sentence discounts" for multiple child-sex offenders and pornographers. This law would have the effect of keeping perverts in jail for longer terms, thus protecting the public for longer periods, and would therefore cost more to implement. But does my colleague really want to see perverts and child pornographers on the street instead of behind bars?

Similarly, ending house arrests for serious and violent crimes would undoubtedly put more people in prison but would also protect the public. Likewise, strengthening the handling of

serious and repeat young offenders would likely mean more jail time for them but would also make life less miserable for their victims.

Let's end by looking at something the Tories have already enacted: a law eliminating the faint-hope clause, which gave the chance of early parole to criminals convicted of first-degree murder. Yes, statistics tell us that the murder rate is going down but that still doesn't mean we should let mass killers like Clifford Olson get early parole. I think most Canadians would agree that this monstrous individual should not be given a chance to elude his full sentence, even if it does cost us a little more to keep him locked up for good.

An award-winning journalist, a writer with Edmonton's Report Magazine and Toronto's Catholic Insight magazine, and co-host of RoadkillRadio.com, Face to Face columnist Terry O'Neill is a long-time Coquitlam resident who sits on the board of the Coquitlam Foundation and chairs the finance committee of St. Joseph's Catholic parish.

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