
OPINION LETTERS

Letters to the editor, Oct. 13

Monday, October 12, 2015 7:22:49 EDT PM



Safety priority is 'smoke and mirrors'

Over the last year and a half, Union of Canadian Correctional officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) have carried out an information campaign denouncing Conservative policies. This government has made every effort to complicate our work. Its "tough on crime" policies is nothing but smoke and mirrors. We represent approximately 7,400 federal correctional officers across Canada and many in the Kingston area.

For the first time in our union history we are educating our members and hopefully the Canadian public on reasons why not to vote for the Harper government. The fact of the matter is the Harper government has cut \$688 million from the public safety budget since 2010. In the most recent budget they gave back \$292.5 million spread out over five years, hardly a gain for Canadians in terms of funding public safety. None of that money was given back to Corrections Canada, resulting in a \$355-million cut to the corrections budget impacting on security and programs nationwide.

The Harper government believes in double-bunking of inmates and so do most Canadians for that matter. (Over 60 per cent in a recent poll). They also believe in passing laws to keep inmates in jail longer. Double bunking leads to an increase in violent incidents as supported by numerous research papers and makes working conditions for correctional officers as well as all CSC staff more dangerous. When you overcrowd institutions you diminish access to many programs that are required to successfully reintegrate inmates back into society.

The reality is 80 per cent of offenders currently in our system will end up back into society and the Canadian public needs to ask themselves, how do they want these individuals entering back into their communities? In addition to this the Harper government has failed to protect our basic health and safety by changing the definition of the Canada labour code without warning, making it more difficult to resolve serious health and safety issue in our workplace. That being said we recognize our job is dangerous and accept the risks but we need to ensure we are doing everything possible to keep staff, inmates and the public safe.

The Harper government has also failed to implement a blood samples Act to protect correctional officers and their families when inmates attack officers with blood, urine or feces. We have been lobbying for this legislation since 2005. They have also attacked labour with unprecedented rigour which is now having a negative impact on the moral and working conditions of front-line correctional officers.

We hope Canadians value what we have to say about public safety as front-line officers. We think it's important.

Jason Godin 2nd National Vice-President Union of Canadian Correctional Officers,