

Culture Proposal # 2

Keeping Our Communities Safe From Crime

After fourteen years on the decline, violent crime has increased in 2 of the past 3 years. It's no accident. Under George Bush, the federal government has disengaged on crime just as millions of prisoners are due to be released from confinement. We must protect our communities and our families by calling for federal reengagement in crime fighting through new legislation to make crime fighting a national priority again.

THE PROBLEM

The federal government has let its guard down just as crime is coming back

In the 1990s, the federal government mounted a huge attack on crime in response to escalating crime rates. This effort included landmark legislation that helped cities, towns, and states hire 100,000 police officers, develop new crime-fighting technologies, and prevent youths from engaging in crime through weekend and after-school interventions. Over the next decade, crime rates fell to levels not seen in generations.

But in the face of success, the Bush Administration has let its guard down just as several dangerous new crime trends have emerged. As a result, over the last three years, America's crime rate has now risen twice—the first time that has happened since 1992. And the American public is concerned. A recent Third Way poll reveals that Americans believe that crime in our country is getting worse by a five-to-one margin.¹ Our communities need the federal government to reclaim its role as a leader in fighting America's crime problem through new legislation that puts crime back on the front burner.

The federal government has backed away from its promise to help states, cities and towns fight crime.

If the 1990s were about federal engagement, the 2000s have been about disengagement. During this decade, federal criminal justice aid to states has dropped by 56%.² The COPS program devoted to hiring 100,000 police officers for local cities and towns was steadily cut beginning in 2000 and entirely de-funded by FY 2006.³ Today, there are fewer police per capita than there were almost a decade ago.⁴

In the past year alone, the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant funding, which has been described by the National Governors Association as the "most essential crime

fighting program over the years,⁵ was cut by 67%.⁶ In his FY2009 Budget Request, the President has requested zero funding for Byrne/JAG.

Federal prosecutions of crime have plummeted.

Since 2001, the number of FBI agents devoted to crime and drug cases has fallen 20%, from 2,426 to 1,938.⁷ The number of criminal cases investigated by the FBI has dropped by one-third—from roughly 31,000 cases in 2000 to slightly more than 20,000 in 2005.⁸ FBI referrals resulting in prosecutions also declined by one-third—from 19,168 in 2000 to 12,713 in 2006.⁹

Local law enforcement has taken on the additional burdens of homeland security and illegal immigration.

Local law enforcement is now called upon to shoulder traditional federal responsibilities, such as immigration enforcement and terrorism-related duties. In Missouri, state and local law enforcement officers made over 5,000 inquiries to the Law Enforcement Support Center at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the 2007 fiscal year—approximately double the 2006 figure.¹⁰ A 50-state survey found that over 10% of state law enforcement agencies reported allocating fewer resources for traditional criminal investigation and drug enforcement because of their new terrorism responsibilities.¹¹

THE SOLUTION

A 21st century comprehensive crime bill

The federal government must aggressively reengage in fighting America's crime problem through a new 21st century comprehensive crime initiative.

This plan would forcefully put the federal government back in local crime-fighting efforts.

This proposal, modeled in part on a bill introduced by Senator Joe Biden of Delaware (The Crime Control and Prevention Act of 2007), would include:

- **More Cops:** Put 50,000 cops back on the beat by restoring COPS funding to \$1.15 billion per year;¹²
- **Modern Policing:** Provide new funding for law enforcement agencies to invest in modern policing technologies like hot spot mapping, hot list databases, and gunshot detectors by restoring COPS funding to \$1.15 billion per year;¹³
- **More Drug and Local Crime Resources:** Restore Byrne/JAG funding to \$1.1 billion per year, allowing local law enforcement to implement tailored responses to local crime and drug problems;¹⁴
- **More Research in New Technologies:** Boost research in new technologies and evidence-based approaches to fight crime through a \$30 million National Institute of Justice grant;

- **More Terrorism Resources for Local Crime Fighting:** Restore Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program funding to \$500 million and provide local law enforcement with resources for both terrorism prevention and local crime fighting;
- **More FBI Support:** Dedicate \$160 million to add 1,000 FBI agents to help with the FBI's capacity to fight traditional crime;¹⁵ and
- **Partnership Initiative between Federal, State and Local Governments:** Reestablish the partnership between the federal government, states, and cities in the form of a new Joint Crime Commission to bolster communication and collaboration to fight crime.

The proposed initiative will avert a new wave of crime.

The greatest decrease in crime in modern American history coincided with the greatest federal investment in combating local crime. Between 1994 and 2001, the violent crime rate plunged 26% and the murder rate 34%.¹⁶ Experts ranging from the Government Accountability Office to the Brookings Institution have highlighted the importance of the federal government's support for local law enforcement and innovative approach to crime fighting as components of the crime decline of the 1990s.¹⁷ This plan would reestablish the federal government's commitment to help solve America's modern crime problem.

THE ROLLOUT

Ideas for launching and publicizing a federal reengagement

- **Hold a press conference in front of a local police department or federal law enforcement building with neighborhood watch groups and/or victims of crime.**
- **Prepare a short report and/or visual on crime rates in the state or region using readily attainable public data.**
- **Include information on the severe cuts in federal crime-fighting funding to the state or region, again using readily attainable public data.**
- **For added exposure, pick a day to hold the event that can attract a news hook. For example, July 26, 2008 is the 100th anniversary of the FBI—a great news hook.**

CRITIQUES & RESPONSES

A 21st century comprehensive crime bill

The crime rate is going down.

The dramatic reduction in crime that we've experienced has stopped. In two of the past three years, the rate for violent crime has gone up—the first time that has occurred since 1992.

In addition, the time to fix the roof isn't when it is pouring out. And we know that storm clouds are gathering on crime. There are several new and dangerous sociological trends converging and threatening an impending crime wave if left unaddressed—particularly the release of 3.5 million prisoners throughout America over the next 5 years.

Crime fighting is a local issue and should be left up to state and local authorities.

July 26, 2008 is the 100th anniversary of the creation of the FBI. That's when America first realized that crime wasn't purely a local matter. But it wasn't until the early 1990s that the federal government truly engaged as a partner in local crime-fighting. It was a remarkable success. The crime rate fell to levels not seen in decades. Now we are forgetting all of the lessons we should have learned from our success and the crime rate is turning back.

Fighting terrorism should be the priority of the federal government.

The federal government should invest in fighting terrorists in conjunction with fighting domestic crime, not at the expense of fighting domestic crime. As stated by FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III in October 2007, "We are realizing that national security is as much about reducing the number of homicides on our streets as it is about reducing the threat of terrorism."¹⁸

In a recent poll, Americans feel that crime is more of a threat to their own safety than terrorism by a 69-19% margin.¹⁹

It's too expensive.

Over five years, this bill would cost \$14.7 billion. That's billions of dollars less than the amount of the money we could save if we eliminated earmarks in appropriation bills.²⁰ There are some who think it's not worth the money to get criminals off the street and make communities safer, but keeping people safe is the primary role of government.

Endnotes

¹ Cooper and Secrest, Survey of 1,139 likely voters, December 15-19, 2007.

² This calculation is based on the total of \$944 million for COPS, Byrne/JAG, and Byrne Discretionary in FY 2008 compared to the total of COPS, Byrne Discretionary and the former Byrne Formula and LLEBG grants in FY 2001.

³ Data from Congressional Research Service and National Criminal Justice Association.

⁴ Third Way analysis of FBI UCR Data, Table 70 "Police Employees," over multiple years.

⁵ Nolan Jones testimony, National Governors Association, Testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Crime regarding Oversight of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, March 5, 2002, <http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.0f8c660ba7cf98d18a27811050101010a0/?vgnnextoid=30de9e2f1b001010VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>.

⁶ John Gramlich, "Federal Spending Plan Slashes Anti-Crime Grants," *Stateline.org*, December 31, 2007.

⁷ Crime in America: The Federal Government's Responsibility to Help Fight Crime in Our Communities, A Report from Senator Joseph Biden, October 2007. Biden report cites U.S. Government Accountability Office, "FBI Transformation: FBI Continues to Make Progress in its Efforts to Transform and Address Priorities," Testimony before the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, March 2004.

⁸ Paul Shokovsky, Tracy Johnson, and Daniel Lathrop, "The FBI's terrorism trade-off," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 2007.

⁹ TRAC FBI, "FBI Enforcement Trends: 1986-2006," June 2008, <http://trac.syr.edu/tracfb/newfindings/v05/include/20yearbasicstable.html>.

¹⁰ Lynn Franey, "Add Immigration to Troopers Responsibilities." *Kansas City Star*, December 17, 2007: <http://www.kansascity.com/105/story/407906-p2.html>.

¹¹ *The Impact of Terrorism on State Law Enforcement*, The Council of State Governments and Eastern Kentucky University, April 2005.

¹² Based on the 2007 Biden Crime Control and Prevention Act calling for funding of COPS restored to a level of \$1.15 billion per year.

¹³ Based on the 2007 Biden Crime Control and Prevention Act calling for funding of COPS restored to a level of \$1.15 billion per year.

¹⁴ As recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

¹⁵ Based on the 2007 Biden Crime Control and Prevention Act calling for authorization of \$160 million to add 1,000 FBI agents.

¹⁶ FBI Uniform Crime Report Data, 1991-2005.

¹⁷ *Community Policing Grants: COPS Grants Were a Modest Contributor to the Declines in Crime in the 1990s*, U.S. Government Accountability Office, Report to the House Committee on the Judiciary, October 2005; John J. Donohue III and Jens Ludwig, *More COPS*, Policy Brief #158, The Brookings Institution, March 2007.

¹⁸ Dan Eggen and John Solomon, "Justice Dept.'s Focus has Shifted," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/10/16/AR2007101602370.html>.

¹⁹ Cooper and Secrest, Survey of 1,139 likely voters, December 15-19, 2007.

²⁰ Taxpayers for Common Sense, Database of Congressional Earmarks for FY2008, June 11, 2008.