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# Provinces bear rising justice costs, budget watchdog finds

### Cost of jails, courts and policing up 23% in last decade, amid drop in crime rate

The Canadian Press Posted: Mar 20, 2013 9:35 AM ET | Last Updated: Mar 20, 2013 7:15 PM ET 371



Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page's final report reveals that almost three quarters of rising jail, court and policing costs are carried by the provinces, even though it's the federal government that sets justice policy. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

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Per capita spending on criminal justice — including federal and provincial jails, court costs and policing — has climbed 23 per cent over the last decade even as the crime rate fell 23 per cent, says a new study by the Parliamentary budget office.

The report, a first-of-its kind, comprehensive look at criminal justice costs over time, put the price tag at \$20.3 billion in 2011-12.

The authors looked at direct public spending on policing, courts and corrections, including parole. They excluded costs such as victims compensation, private security and non-criminal matters such as family, environmental

and competition law.

Almost \$15 billion of the total last year, or 73 per cent, was carried by the provinces and municipalities.

"It is important to note that in Canada, the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction to make criminal law, unlike the United States where each state has this power," the study states.

"With regards to the enforcement of criminal law, it is the responsibility of the provinces and territories."

The Conservative government has been on a seven-year push to increase sentences and introduce new laws, citing its own internal study that claims crime costs victims \$100 billion a year in Canada.

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## Toews concerned about policing costs

In January, Public Safety Minister Vic Toews warned a policing conference in Ottawa that rising police costs cannot be maintained.

"A decade ago, the average Canadian readily accepted, almost without question, steady increases in police budgets," Toews told the conference in a prepared speech.

"Today, however, there are increasing calls to demonstrate the value of the investments that all governments make in public services, including policing."

The budget office report released Wednesday shows a direct correlation between Prime Minister Stephen Harper taking office in 2006 and a jump in criminal justice spending, both in Ottawa and elsewhere.

Crime rates, meanwhile, have been on a steady decline since 2003 — a trend the office says it included in the report "for illustrative purposes only."

"This paper is not policy advice," the authors state.

That didn't forestall a heated policy debate over the report in the House of Commons.

## Nicholson defends record

NDP justice critic Francoise Boivin said costs are "sky-rocketing" — and landing on provincial ledgers — even though the crime rate was already on the way down when the Harper government came to power.

"This report proves the Conservative crime agenda is more about photo ops and partisanship than getting results," she charged.

Justice Minister Rob Nicholson responded that his government "makes no apologies for cracking down on crime," adding the Conservatives have introduced 30 pieces of legislation on the file since 2006.

Nicholson said the "cost of crime is borne by victims; that's the side (New Democrats) are never on."

Bob Rae, the Liberal interim leader, also waded in, saying in a release the report confirms "what Liberals have long suspected about this government's so-called 'tough on crime' agenda: that it is, in fact, tough on taxpayers."

## Final report before Page exit

The report is the last to be released under the watch of Kevin Page, Parliament's first fiscal watchdog whose eventful five-year term ends Monday.

Provincial security and court costs, as well as federal corrections costs all climbed by more than 40 per cent between 2002 and 2012, while federal security costs rose 53 per cent, the study said.

Policing costs were "relatively flat" before beginning a steady climb in 2007, the same year corrections costs reversed course and began rising. Court costs — including judges, prosecutors, legal aid and youth justice — had been decreasing, but started up again in 2006, although they still haven't reached 2002 levels.

Court costs shifted toward the provinces and territories and off Ottawa over the study period.

In 2002, the federal government carried 32 per cent of criminal court costs, but that had fallen to 22 per cent by 2012. The provincial share, meanwhile rose 10 points to 78 per cent.

Provincial incarceration rates were also on the rise, while federal rates actually fell, the report said.

down

### External Links

- [Read the Parliamentary Budget Officer's Expenditure Analysis of Criminal Justice in Canada](#)
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#### Budget watchdog won't leave quietly

Mar. 20, 2013 3:43 PM

With a new budget looming and old budget questions still unanswered, outgoing Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page is using his final days on the job to fight the government in court.

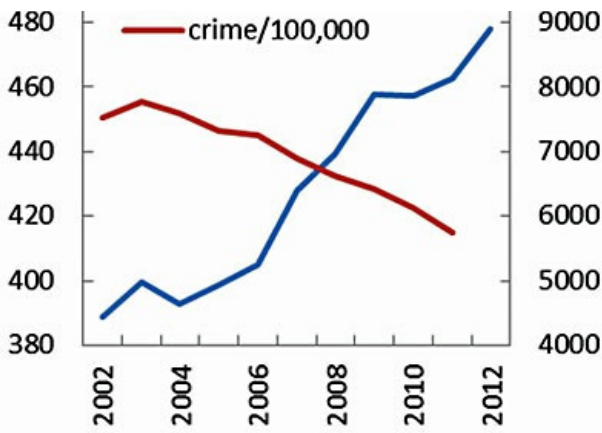
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Source: Parliamentary Budget Office

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**bokamaru**

2013/03/20 at 8:44 AM ET

Rating  
1063

1106 [43](#)

We are certainly going to miss Kevin Page and without someone like him keeping an eye on the ever-questionable spending habits of the Harper gang, we'll have no one guarding the hen house.

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**Greg Howard**

2013/03/20 at 8:48 AM ET

Rating  
844

867 [23](#)

Well done Kevin. You will be sorely missed as a voice of truth in the wilderness. No doubt there will be cries of foul from the PMO. How dare you tell Canadians something true? Your record as matched with jim flaherty's stands for itself. I fear we are now entering a period of silence and propaganda. Goodbye Kevin, and thank you from all Canadians, (except those who drink the kool-aid supplied by harper).

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**Kristen T.**

2013/03/20 at 8:56 AM ET

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683

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The Harper Government is introducing mandatory minimums which are a proven costly failure.

It takes away judicial discretion and is a one sized fits all approach to justice.

It is downloading additional costs onto the provinces for those serving time in provincially run institutions with no offset in funding for the additional costs.

It is a dumb on crime approach under the guise of being tough on crime and does nothing to address the root causes of crime nor does it fundamentally address the importance of investing in crime prevention.

The policy flies in the face of falling crime rates and will do nothing to decrease crime or make the streets any safer.

The Harper Government has been warned by experts in the field the policy will be a failure not only in terms of additional cost to the taxpayers but in societal costs when rehabilitation and prevention should be the goal.

It will disproportionately affect the poor and minorities.

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**broughad**

2013/03/20  
at 8:58 AM ET

Kevin Page will be missed by people who care about how tax revenues are spent, i.e., not Conservatives.

I wonder who the new lapdog, I mean watchdog, is going to be.

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568

590 22  
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**lilthomas**

2013/03/20  
at 9:01 AM ET

Hi Kevin -  
Thank you for your insight, your fairness and your accuracy.  
You will be missed.  
Sincerely,  
LIL

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543

559 16  
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