



DEBATE PREP: CRIME BILL DILEMMA-- LEGISLATION NEEDED DURING CRACK AND MURDER EPIDEMIC, NOW FAIRER STRATEGIES REQUIRED

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 26, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In an op-ed published today in OpEdNews and named H2 (#2 oped in nation), former White House National Drug Policy spokesman Robert Weiner and Solutions for Change policy analyst John Black argue that the 1994 Crime Bill was necessary at the time, but newer and fairer strategies are now needed.

Weiner and Black begin, "Last week in New Hampshire, 2020 Democratic frontrunner Joe Biden was asked about criminal justice reform, specifically the 1994 Crime Bill, to which he responded: 'When I wrote the crime bill, which you've been conditioned to say is a bad bill, there's only one provision that had to do with mandatory sentences that I opposed, and that was the 'three strikes and you're out,' which I thought was a mistake, but had a lot of other good things in the bill.'"

They argue, "With the first Democratic Primary debate, in Miami on June 26 and 27, rapidly approaching, he can and should stop being so defensive. The bill was a response to record drug abuse and murder wave. Since the bill, monthly drug abuse has fallen by half, from 17% to 8% of the population, and violent crime and murders have likewise dropped."

They continue, "There were certainly positives in the bill, like the federal assault weapons ban, community based policing, and the Violence Against Women Act, but twenty-five years later, the legacy of the legislation according to the critics is controversy and mass incarceration--at the time, however, even Bernie Sanders voted for the bill. In fact, the bill's comprehensive approach of prevention, treatment, enforcement, drug courts (now at 3000 from the original eight) instead of imprisonment, plus a foreign policy of anti-drug assistance against drug cultivation, has together led to the statistical successes. If any other American ill across the spectrum-- illiteracy, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, suicide, homelessness-- were reduced by half, would we call it a failure? We'd say 'progress, and more needs to be done in better ways.'"

"It's a fact that after the bill became law, decreases in crime and drug abuse dramatically shot up."

They write, "According to the Brennan Center for Justice, however, studies show that even the mass incarceration enforced by the law actually "played a limited role" in decreasing crime. However, the Center's research shows that social and economic factors, such as an aging population and the passing of Roe v. Wade in 1973, are more responsible."

They continue, "In 2017, the Pew Research Center found that Blacks and Hispanics made up 53-percent of the prison population while comprising only 28-percent of the US adult population. The imprisonment rate for African-Americans, however, is what stands out. For every 100,000 black people, 1,549 are imprisoned--nearly six times the rate for white imprisonment."

They contend, "Over the past two and a half decades the United States has developed a prison industrial complex. Privatized prisons have become a tool for corporate economic advancement--18 percent of federal prisoners are in private prisons."

They assert, "Biden and others who supported the bill must acknowledge that America needs criminal justice reform. The Department of Corrections should provide education, treatment, and support for individuals to correct their behavior. For too long we have been senselessly locking up people instead of providing rehabilitation--we haven't been fixing problems, only imprisoning them."

Weiner and Black conclude, "The issue is complicated. Opponents of the law must acknowledge the positives of the 1994 Crime Bill--like Biden's Violence Against Women Act--and re-implement its federal assault weapons ban, to stop the weapons that Clinton banned, but now are used in 95% of mass shootings killing ten or more. But we also need to further expand drug treatment in and out of prison. The nation is in the midst of an opioid epidemic with the scale reminiscent of crack in the 80s. Expanded and comprehensive care both at drug treatment centers and in-home must be available. An addict should not be a prisoner, but a patient. We need to end racial bias in policing, end the system that emphasizes punishment instead of improvement, and bring justice to all Americans."

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