

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

Barbed wire seen on an exterior fence at Kingston Penitentiary. The government announced in April that it will close the maximum security facility.

The Globe and Mail

What readers think

May 11: Letters to the editor

From Friday's Globe and Mail

Published Thursday, May. 10, 2012 6:22PM EDT

Last updated Thursday, May. 10, 2012 6:27PM EDT

Same-sex politics

I sure do like Barack Obama. The U.S. President is charismatic, balanced and has the courage to stand up for freedom ('Same-Sex Couples Should Be Able To Get Married' – May 10). By contrast, our leadership is relentlessly partisan and stands up only to make way for the oil and gas industry.

Thor Kuhlmann, Vancouver

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Prisoners' treatment

I am appalled that the Harper government proposes to claw back money from prisoners who earn a tiny allowance for their work (Tough On Crime Agenda Filling Prisons – May 10). It is Dickensian. Prisoners are generally socially disadvantaged people with isolation, poverty, mental-health and addictions issues. They need to be encouraged through fairness, education, discipline and training to take up positive roles in society. Taking away some of the tiny allowance they earn for prison work will provoke depression, frustration and anger in a population already in deplorable conditions.

Is the real government agenda to demoralize and destabilize prisons so they can be handed over to the private sector?

Maureen Reilly, Toronto

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Canada's correctional system has the capacity to manage the prisoner population. There has not been a massive influx in inmates. We've been able to close two inefficient facilities; the 2,700 new cells previously announced will streamline operations at existing facilities while improving prison infrastructure.

Advocacy groups claim that the offender accountability measures announced by our government are unfair to prisoners and will negatively impact their rehabilitation. We are committed to prisoner rehabilitation. The key components to effective rehabilitation are responsibility and accountability. Law-abiding Canadians pay their way, settle their debts and contribute to their own well-being – we expect prisoners to do the same. The accountability measures will save taxpayers \$10-million each year, while teaching prisoners the key principles of responsibility.

Vic Toews, Minister of Public Safety

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Canada's treatment of female prisoners with mental-health issues is characterized by a lack of appropriate treatment, which leads to institutional adjustment issues and a cycle of use of force, ballooning sentences, segregation and involuntary transfer away from family and community support. These issues are exacerbated when prisons are over capacity and there are additional demands on guards and even less access to mental-health treatment.

Our research indicates that maximum-security at Grand Valley Institution for Women in Ontario is overcrowded and that mentally ill women are asking to be segregated in order to get time alone. If this isn't indicative of the problem, I don't know what is.

Renu J. Mandhane, director, International Human Rights Program, Faculty of Law, University of Toronto

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Your article cites overcrowding, double-bunking and some prisoners' sleeping in gymnasiums, etc., plus a proposed move to make prisoners pay more for room, board and phone calls in the institutions. Am I and other law-abiding members of society supposed to be ashamed and appalled?