

Mixed views on proposed tougher policies for killers

By Bill Rea

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has announced his government plans to get tougher with the more heinous of murders in this country.

Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson said he's all for to proposed changes. But Ed Crewson, who recently secured the Liberal nomination in the riding for the next federal election, wondered if the government has nothing more pressing to worry about. "I think there are more important issues that should be tackled," he commented.

The government's plan is that life will mean life (meaning no parole) for people who commit certain types of first-degree murders. Those types include acts that involve terrorism, kidnapping or forced confinement, sexual assault, the killing of police officers, etc. There have been reports that there will also be provisions that would allow these people to seek "exceptional release" after 35 years, but only by applying to the federal cabinet.

Tilson commented the government already addressed this issue in the speech from the throne a couple of years ago.

He also recalled his time as an MPP, when then Premier Mike Harris sent him around the province to interview people like police officers, teachers and relatives of victims, and the overwhelming majority expressed concerned that some of these killers could get out after 25 years.

He added he agrees with the government's proposals.

"I wholeheartedly support it now, as I did then," he remarked. "Why would these people be eligible for parole?"

Tilson acknowledged that some people believe the hope of parole might encourage people in prison to behave, but he didn't think that should make a difference.

"Life should mean life, not 25 years," he said.

But Crewson, who spent 22 years on the Police Services Board in Shelburne, wondered how often someone who serves 25 years for murder gets out to kill again.

"Is the parole board doing such a terrible job that you'd take the job out of their hands and give it to the federal cabinet?" he asked. "I don't think it's a national priority."

Crewson added his 22-year-old son is more worried about global warming, than the chances of being murdered by someone who's served 25 years.

Tilson wasn't sure if these new provisions could be put in place during the current term of Parliament, since an election is expected later this year.

"Once the writ drops, that's the end of it," he observed. "It will be tough, but it's possible," he said. "If it can get out of the House of Commons, it's possible."