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Steele touts "Right on Crime" agenda

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By [Marie Price](#)

Posted: 03:43 PM Tuesday, March 15, 2011

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One mark against House Speaker Kris Steele's "Right on Crime" program announced Tuesday is that it started in Texas. Another? Steele now has to sell the idea to a legislature known for a historically ingrained "lock 'em up and throw away the key" philosophy.

Steele said Oklahoma's per capita incarceration rate is twice the national average, ranking number one for women and third for male offenders.

The speaker said Right on Crime centers on incarcerating dangerous offenders while boosting use of community sentencing, GPS monitoring, treatment and other programs for others. As an example he cited the Women in Recovery program, which started in Tulsa. he said that 90 percent of the program's graduates are experiencing positive, productive lives.

"We can be both tough on crime and smart on crime," Steele said.

Putting more and more people into prison just isn't workable, he added.

Steele pointed out that Oklahoma's prison system is chronically at around 97 percent of capacity. He also said the Department of Corrections is routinely strapped for funding, having to seek supplemental funds during 10 out of the past 11 years.

Asked how he plans to persuade the tough-on-crime contingent, Steele said serious offenders would still go to prison.

"Ultimately, when it comes to those individuals who are dangerous or pose a threat to public safety or society in general, those individuals ought to be locked up," he said. "Public safety is first and foremost in everything that we're talking about here. But ultimately, if we don't do something different, there's not going to be a place to house the dangerous criminals that could truly pose a threat to society."

The basic concept, he said, is to increase public safety while reducing crime and saving taxpayer dollars. Much of the Right on Crime agenda is contained in Steele's [HB 2131](#), which passed the House Tuesday.

Mark Levin, with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, said that at present the prison system grows as it fails.

““Instead of pouring more money into the current corrections system, we need to restructure it to make sure taxpayers are getting the most for their money,” Levin said. “States can save millions by increasing rehabilitation programs, which are often more effective than incarceration.”

In addition to saving money while insuring public safety, Levin said the program focuses on better outcomes for low-risk, nonviolent offenders. When they leave prison without having received any services or treatment, he said, they are more likely to re-offend.

Officials said Right on Crime also performance-based evaluation of corrections measures to gauge their effectiveness and efficiency.



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NETWORKING CALENDAR

Today

Wednesday, March 16

Showing events after 3/16.

[Look for earlier events](#)

Wednesday, March 16

Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage C

7:30am Partners in Peak Perform

7:30am ELC Roundtable – Meetin

11:30am PRSA-OKC – Seminar, "E

11:30am Oklahoma Safety Council

6:00pm Indian Nation Council of G

Thursday, March 17

Events shown in time
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