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## **We know how to win the war on crime**

Though the trends were headed in opposite directions, the 1990s proved as sweet for anti-crime advocates as they did for stock market players. While stocks soared for most of the decade, nearly all categories of crime in the United States dropped.

But just as the Wall Street bubble burst, last week's release of the annual FBI crime report showing an increase of crime in America seems to indicate that the days of plunging crime are over.

Murders are up, as are robberies, burglaries and car thefts for the first time in nearly a decade, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program. The crime increase comes at a particularly bad time.

The costly war on terrorism being fought abroad is forcing Washington lawmakers to make tough budgetary choices. Dwindling tax revenues collected by cities and states due to the slowing economy are forcing those same tough decisions on local government.

And an upswing in America's teenage population, the nation's most crime-prone age category, isn't helping the near-term crime outlook.

However, as the United States fights a war for security abroad, the war for safety and security here on America's streets cannot be forgotten. The FBI's sobering statistics should push the fight for true domestic tranquillity closer to the top of our priority list.

We know, to a large degree, how to reduce crime. While flashy strategies like curfews, boot camps for youth and massive prison building have met with mixed results, programs that keep youth in schools and bring police closer to those they are sworn to protect have uniformly reduced crime.

One notable program is the youth safe haven/police mini-station concept orchestrated by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation in more than a dozen communities across the United States.

Under the plan, the foundation brings together police, public housing agencies and nonprofit youth or community development organizations. Local police provide up to

three officers to mentor youth and solve community problems. The housing agency donates space, and the community organization runs the safe haven and helps to oversee a mentoring course taught to police by Eisenhower staff.

Modeled on a Japanese policing program, the safe haven concept brings youth (who use the facility for after-school studies, mentoring and the like) closer to police officers in their neighborhood.

When this program is initiated in a community, crime reporting may spike as residents feel more comfortable talking to the police officers, whom they see on a regular basis. But criminal activity has dropped by double digits in communities from Boston to San Juan once the program is up and running.

The problem is that programs like the youth safe haven/mini station and others from scores of other government-funded anti-crime groups are threatened in the scramble for scarce Congressional funding.

Trends, even positive ones like a red-hot economy and a falling crime rate, can't continue forever no matter how much we may want them to.

The difference is that while our economy and Wall Street are mere servants of financial tides and spending patterns both here and overseas, we can do something about reducing crime if we have the political will and dollars to replicate what works. What will we gain as a nation if we defeat terrorists abroad and lose our streets?

*Curtis is president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a Washington D.C.-based non-profit organization that evaluates model programs designed to reduce crime.*