

I hope Members on both sides of the aisle will approach this bill in a cooperative spirit with respect to further rights of Senators to offer their amendments and get votes, and that we will not see Members drawing lines in the sand or deciding that they are going to block action going forward because I think this bill could be a model of how we should operate.

Thank you, Mr. President.

AMENDMENT NO. 1744

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, on Tuesday, the Senate adopted an amendment offered by the junior Senator from Louisiana, which effectively imposes a lifetime ban on individuals who have been convicted of certain serious crimes from obtaining Federal housing assistance. Today is a new legislative day, and many of us in this body may have already moved on to the next meeting, the next issue, the next vote. But as I have reflected on that amendment, I am concerned the direction these types of amendments are taking us.

I had significant concerns with the lack of notice given to Senators about the amendment offered by Senator VITTER, and the speed with which a vote was scheduled. In the span of roughly 90 minutes, the amendment was filed, made pending, and set for a rollcall vote. This amendment was never considered by the relevant subcommittee in the markup of the bill, nor vetted for unintended consequences.

I am deeply concerned about what the sort of amendment offered by the junior Senator from Louisiana says about us as a Senate, and as a Nation. Following on the heels of a similar amendment offered by Senator VITTER on the farm bill, I expect that similar amendments will be filed and offered on virtually every future bill. This has to stop.

In our system of justice, when someone is convicted of a crime and serves a sentence, I believe that person deserves a second chance and an opportunity to reintegrate as a productive member of society. That is a principle of fairness and justice that I know not only from my days as a prosecutor, but through my time as chairman of the Judiciary Committee. It is a basic notion instilled in me from an early age, and reinforced by my faith. As I have long heard from the faith community, it is our moral obligation to rehabilitate and restore people who have committed crimes. We all have made mistakes, and I challenge any Member to come to the floor and say that they haven't themselves sought forgiveness or a second chance.

We have to get past the point where we are scoring political points on the backs of those who have committed crimes but have served their sentence. We must find a way to reintegrate them into society. That is how we make our communities safer.

No one in this body should want a convicted felon to become a repeat offender. And I assume no Senator wants

to punish the family members of an offender for crimes they did not commit. Yet that would be the effect of the Vitter amendments. Such measures have the effect of extending punishment beyond the original term; they would act as a lifetime ban and make it harder for ex-offenders and their families to get back on their feet. I reluctantly supported the amendment this week because Federal regulations already give housing officials the ability to keep dangerous criminals, sex offenders, and domestic abusers out of public housing. While this diminishes somewhat the overall impact of that amendment, the mandatory draconian nature of the Vitter amendment remains deeply troubling. As the senior Senator from Louisiana stated when Senator VITTER offered a similar amendment a few years ago, such an approach is simply "mean-spirited and counterproductive."

I am concerned that this is just the first of a series of similarly mean-spirited and counterproductive amendments. Now that the Senate has moved to impose a lifetime ban on food and housing assistance for some who have served their criminal sentences, what will be next? Will we next decide to take away education or employment assistance? Should we ban ex-offenders from libraries or public parks? The aggregate effect of such efforts will be to relegate an ex-offender and perhaps his or her family to a lifetime of poverty, homelessness, and isolation. That does not make us safer. It just makes us meaner and less compassionate. I hope we will stop using this political tactic and work together to help give people a second chance.

I know many Senators here share this goal. This is a complicated issue that demands thoughtful solutions, and we must work together if we have any hope of achieving real change. Public safety is about more than lengthy prison sentences. It also requires efforts to reintegrate into our communities those who have served their time. We know that reentry efforts reduce recidivism and we must be thoughtful when we take options off the table like we did this week.

I praise groups like the Conference of Catholic Bishops, Prison Fellowship, and the Sentencing Project who have worked tirelessly to help provide opportunities for individuals who have committed crimes, and to work toward the rehabilitation and restoration of their families. At the core of their work are fundamental notions of justice and compassion—the same principles that I hope will guide the work of the Senate as we go forward.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate go to a period of morning business, with the time equally divided between the minority and majority, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

#### FUNDING LEVELS

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, what we have seen is a recognition that these are tough times and we need some belt-tightening. But to go back to this level of sequestration is not the right thing to do because that is taking a meat cleaver approach, across-the-board, on cutting Federal programs. It is just not a responsible way of belt-tightening. Fortunately, this motion to recommit, to in essence go to the level of appropriations for Transportation and Housing and Urban Development that was to take it to the level of the House, which is considerably lower than what has come out of our Appropriations Committee in the Senate—fortunately, this motion to recommit was defeated.

Why do we want to cut funding, as the House bill does, to critical areas such as air traffic controllers?

It is dangerous, shortsighted, and we have been to this rodeo before. As a matter of fact, doesn't anyone remember that earlier in the year we had to fix the sequestration cuts that went into effect in the current fiscal year because it was cutting out all kinds of air traffic controllers and furloughed a number of them and closed the contract towers for the small airports? We had to reverse that. The public rose and said: This is not the right nor intelligent thing to do when it comes to the public safety.

In addition to compromising the safety of the traveling public, those air traffic cuts would have increased the flight delays by hours and hours and caused a lot of cancellations. Lo and behold, when the American traveling public saw that was exactly what was happening, they rose and they said: Enough. The body politic responded. Here was an attempt to repeat that. If we reduce the top line of funding for this next fiscal year on this bill, we are going to be right back in the same situation where we were last spring: scrambling to keep our aviation system functioning safely and again delaying the next generation of air traffic controllers which we are desperately trying to set up.

This House of Representatives sequestration budget—outside of aviation—is going to mean more crumbling roads and bridges, more families unable to put a roof over their heads, and our infrastructure will continue to be falling into further disrepair. So it is our responsibility to keep our country safe and the economy moving. Thank goodness we rejected this attempt to go back to the Dark Ages, but we are going to have more and more of this.

We have a bill that is coming up next Tuesday in a markup in the Commerce Committee of the NASA authorization bill. Here is a bill that has never been partisan. It is not only bipartisan, it has been nonpartisan. We have never