

motor vehicles department or the county clerk's office. In my view our Governor, Gov. Kate Brown, deserves enormous credit for leading the effort to turn this particular idea, this particular reform, into law.

I know many of my colleagues and many voters are cynical about the chances of passing real reforms in this partisan day and age. My view is, voting rights are too important to abandon the field to special interests who would manipulate our government. That is why I mentioned that in Oregon there was some initial debate with respect to who might benefit, who might get a little bit of a partisan edge on the other side, and Oregon voters said: Nothing doing. We all think this is in our interests, making it easier to vote, making it easier to correct an error, and cheaper than the alternatives.

This afternoon I urge my colleagues and voters to take advantage of this opportunity to promote real reform, reform where we have hard evidence that shows it actually works, to make sure every citizen in America who wants to vote has that opportunity. Oregon once again paves the way to making sure there are real solutions to an enormous challenge.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

SENTENCING REFORM AND CORRECTIONS ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, after many months of discussion and debate, today we announced a bipartisan piece of legislation to reform our criminal justice system.

I have been in the Senate long enough to realize that even the best ideas that don't have bipartisan support go nowhere. The good news is, this is an issue that enjoys broad bipartisan support and actually represents the marriage of two distinct parts. The more I think about it, the more it represents a continuum in terms of the way we punish people who violate our criminal laws and how we treat them when they are in prison and how we prepare them—or not—for a life of reentry into civil society.

Even in the polarized political environment that our country represents today, it is an example of an opportunity to demonstrate that when enough people identify a problem and work together, we can actually come up with viable solutions.

In a previous life, I served 13 years as a State district court judge and then as attorney general. I have had an opportunity to witness some of the strengths and weaknesses of our justice system firsthand. Though we made some significant progress in reducing crime across the country—by the way, that ought to be the litmus test, the crime rate. If the crime rate is going down, to me, it indicates we are doing something right. If the crime rate goes up,

that is pretty much a litmus test that we are doing something wrong.

The truth is, our criminal justice system has been plagued with inefficiencies, overcrowding, and failures that are ultimately detrimental to public safety. We spend too much of our criminal justice resources locking up low-level, nonviolent offenders and not enough targeting the most dangerous and violent criminals. The good news is, a number of States, including Texas, have seen the need and have implemented statewide criminal justice reforms with positive results.

As I said earlier, the longer I am here, the more things occur to me about how we do business, but the idea that somehow we can initiate reforms at the national level for 320 million people and then cram them down on a big and diverse country like the United States is pretty ludicrous.

Actually, the Federal Government is rarely competent to do that sort of thing. We saw this with the health care reforms, which have resulted in prices actually going up and most people dissatisfied with the health care reforms.

If we just tried things out at the local level, and if they were successful, then scale them up, I think we would have a much better chance for success. That is exactly what has happened in the criminal justice area.

I know most people think about Texas as a State tough on crime, and that is true, but in the middle of the first decade of this millennium, we saw the need to deal with overcrowding. We saw high recidivism or repeat offenders, and we were facing a major budget shortfall. In other words, we tried to keep building prisons to build our way out of the problem.

Instead of just spending more money to build more prisons and hoping the problems would go away, the major problem we overlooked before was—which we finally realized—that people in prison at some point will mostly get out of prison. The question is, Do they go back into prison after committing other crimes or can we help those who are willing to accept the help, turn their lives around, and become productive members of society?

We opted for a different approach. We traded in our construction plans for plans to help lower-risk offenders turn their lives around and become productive members of society. As I said, that is because most offenders will one day get out of prison.

Today Texas has improved and increased programs designed to help men and women behind bars take responsibility for their crimes and then prepare to reenter society as productive, law-abiding members of the community. I am not naive enough to say this is something we are going to be able to do for 100 percent of the people behind bars. That is just not true. I wish the world was the kind of place where once people made mistakes and ended up behind bars, they could transform their lives universally and then enter pro-

ductive society. It is not true, but there are many who want to who need our help and can benefit from some of these programs.

This includes training that could impact a prisoner's life, somebody with a drug problem, somebody with a mental illness, or somebody who has been drinking, exacerbating their problems. Those sorts of issues can benefit from treatment and from rehabilitation.

Those who are educationally inadequately prepared to enter the workforce, we can help them through work programs and job training. Many of these programs have allowed local communities to get involved as well, by encouraging partnerships in Texas between prisons and faith-based organizations and people who believe in radical transformation of people's lives through their faith. They can focus on helping those prisoners who are willing and wanting to turn their lives around get the training and life skills they need in order to succeed.

I will never forget my visit just a few months back to the H.H. Coffield Unit maximum security prison in East Texas, where I saw firsthand how important some of these types of programs are. I went to one section of the prison and was introduced to the shop instructor. He told me some of the inmates in his shop class came to him unable to read a simple tape measure.

I think it is shocking. It was to me. I think it is shocking to most people that anybody can reach adulthood unable to do something so basic as to read a tape measure, but yet that was an example of the types of people who were in that prison.

It is a remarkable example of how much opportunity there is through education to actually help: drug-alcohol treatment, mental health treatment, and to prepare people to reenter civil society.

I am pleased Texas—in addition to our well-earned reputation for being tough on crime—is now known as being smart on crime and a good example what we could do nationally.

We are not the only State. Other States have done things, too, but the results in Texas are remarkable. Between 2007 and 2012, our overall rate of incarceration fell by 9.4 percent. The crime rate dropped and—as I have said—that is the gold standard. It is not the rate of incarceration. It is not how many people are in prison. It is what is happening to the crime rate. Our crime rate dropped and, not insignificantly, we saved more than \$2 billion of the taxpayer money. We were able to physically close three prison facilities. That is the first time that has ever happened in our State.

We are not the only ones. For example, Georgia reduced its crime rate by more than 10 percent with similar programs. South Carolina and Ohio reduced their crime rate by 14 percent. North Carolina and Texas have both reduced their crime rates by more than 20 percent.

These reforms make our communities safer, which again is the first objective of criminal justice reform, it is the second objective of criminal justice reform, and it is the third objective of criminal justice reform. Does it make our community safer? The answer, from the evidence, is yes.

I think there is no question but that we should consider some of these reforms at the Federal level. Let's take State successes and scale them up so the rest of the country can benefit where they are not otherwise already doing this and where we can do this in the Federal prison system and not just in the State system.

That is where the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act comes in. This bill includes legislation that I introduced last year that takes this Texas model and builds on it to help restore an important part of our criminal justice system that is too often forgotten; that is, rehabilitation.

When I went to law school more years ago than I wish to admit, we were told that the purpose of criminal law was punishment and deterrence, to deter others from committing similar acts. The third was we were told it was rehabilitation. We were going to help people change their lives if they made a mistake. Instead, over time our prisons have become warehouses where we just warehouse people and don't do enough to try to rehabilitate people, those who are willing to take the opportunity to deal with their problems in a constructive sort of way and turn their lives around.

I have introduced legislation, along with Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE of Rhode Island. As anybody who follows the Senate knows, we agree on very little, but we agree on this. We were both former attorneys general. He was a former U.S. attorney, and he has seen a similar experience in his State.

So we introduced this portion of the legislation to encourage programs that would help inmates learn valuable skills they can transfer back home to their communities and help them turn from a life of crime. It is important to note that not only does reduced recidivism impact an individual life—which is reason enough to do what we can to help—but it also helps that individual's family because the collateral damage from somebody making a mistake and ending up in prison does not stop with them. It stops with their families, including their children, and their whole community, but it also makes financial sense too.

The Justice Department spends around 30 percent of its budget detaining Federal inmates. By reinvesting more of this money in recidivism reduction programs instead of building more Federal prisons, we have an opportunity to save tax dollars and plow more of the money back where it can have the best impact. Inmates can be rehabilitated, neighborhoods can be made safer, and tax dollars can be better put to use.

We have also made other changes in the legislation that represent the give-and-take that usually happens in the Senate. Legislating is a consensus-building process, and that is a good thing. Initially, when the corrections act was introduced, there was a separate piece of legislation called the Smarter Sentencing Act, which focused on, as the name would suggest, sentencing with a goal to reduce some of the mandatory minimum sentences which were a part of the 1990s effort to get tougher on crime. This is where we have actually benefited a lot from the input from those who initially were unpersuaded about the merits of that part of the legislation.

For example, we have categorically taken out, removed, any benefit of the Smarter Sentencing Act provisions for somebody who has committed a serious crime, as defined by Federal law. So somebody who is a violent offender, somebody who has committed a serious crime, cannot benefit from the Smarter Sentencing Act.

There is an area where I am afraid there is some misunderstanding by some folks, and some people are actively spreading disinformation, suggesting that as a result of the Smarter Sentencing Act provisions, there is a get-out-of-jail-free card; that we are automatically going to come in and cut prison sentences for people to get out on the street. That is just not true. They need to take another look at the legislation.

Under some circumstances, and only if you are a low-level, nonviolent offender, you can ask the court—the court in which you were actually convicted and before the judge who actually dispensed the sentence and before the prosecutor who actually put you in prison—for a reduction retroactively of long-term mandatory minimum sentences. For example, under some circumstances, back in the days of three strikes and you are out, you could get a life sentence for three relatively minor offenses. Now, where appropriate, the judge could say: Well, we are going to reduce that to 25 years. That is still a long time, particularly if you are talking about three relatively minor offenses. There is one other example where a 20-year mandatory minimum sentence could be reduced to 15 years. So if you haven't served 15 years, you are certainly not going to get out of prison.

But the whole point is that this is a negotiated piece of legislation for which we tried to garner as much support as we could, and I am pleased to announce today that we have five new cosponsors of this legislation. I believe there are now 37 Senators on a bipartisan basis who support this legislation as cosponsors.

Earlier this week, we got a very important endorsement from an organization for which I have tremendous respect. This is the largest organization of prosecutors in America. It is the National District Attorneys Association.

They represent about 1,500 district attorneys and 30,000 assistant district attorneys across the country. They have endorsed this legislation.

Yesterday, at the Republican lunch and conference, we had people such as former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, who served 20 years on the Federal bench in New York, talk about how he thought this was a well-balanced and worthwhile piece of legislation.

The bottom line is that we need to make sure that violent offenders and hardened criminals stay in prison and away from our communities. I am talking about the people who will not take advantage of the opportunity to turn their lives around, the people who must be separated from society because they have made a decision to pursue a life of crime.

At the same time, while we have focused on the hardened criminals and the most violent, we have to address our expanding prison system that too often perpetuates a life of crime. When I was a younger lawyer, I was told that often our prison system is an organization of higher education in crime because, of course, that is who is there—people who have committed crimes. And people who have committed rather low-level, nonviolent offenses, particularly when they are housed with people who have chosen a more violent life of crime, can suffer terrible detrimental impacts.

The idea is to focus on the hardened criminals, the violent criminals, and take a look at the low-level, nonviolent offenders and see if some will take advantage of the opportunity to turn their lives around. Local communities in conservative States—red States such as Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina—have already proven it is possible to do both. After months of discussion, I am confident we can bring this success to the rest of the country with this legislation.

Like every piece of legislation, though, we know there is an arduous path forward. While this bill was voted out of the Senate Judiciary Committee, it still needs to come to the floor of the Senate, where all 100 Senators will have an opportunity to help improve that product. And then there is the House of Representatives. Earlier today, Senator GRASSLEY, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and I met with Congressman BOB GOODLATTE, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, about our ideas together and how we can move this legislation forward. And I know the President is anxious to sign a criminal justice reform bill. This could actually be a good bipartisan accomplishment of the 114th Congress.

I appreciate the bipartisan effort on all sides to work constructively toward a bill that can win broad bipartisan support. For those who don't like parts of the bill, bring your ideas to us. That is the way this process is supposed to work. Let's make it better. Let's build bipartisan support and consensus.

Let me just say in closing that I particularly want to thank the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Chairman GRASSLEY, for his stewardship of this legislation through the process. As an experienced Member of the Senate, somebody who has been at this a while, he knows better than most how to shepherd legislation—particularly potentially controversial legislation—through this process. He has been masterful in bringing us this far.

I think we owe it to our constituents and to the country to take the lessons we have learned at the State and local level and bring those to benefit the rest of the country. Let's make our criminal justice system, as the name suggests, more just and at the same time more effective. And let's save taxpayers a buck or two in the process.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

CENTRAL STATES PENSION FUND

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, across the United States, hundreds of thousands of workers and retirees are scared. They are scared for the future, they are scared for their families, and they are scared for themselves. These workers and retirees did everything right. They played by the rules. They worked for years, if not decades, often in labor-intensive jobs, and they responsibly planned for the future by putting money into their pensions, only to have their retirement security ripped away.

This is a story happening across North Dakota and across America. Harsh and senseless proposed cuts to Central States Pension Fund—a multi-employer pension fund—could rip away the retirement of workers and retirees in the trucking, UPS package and delivery, and grocery supply industries. These cuts could impact more than 2,000 North Dakota families and 400,000 retirees across the country who could see their pensions slashed up to 60 percent. Many of these workers have been forced to retire because of decades of lifting packages over 100 pounds every day. These jobs took hard tolls on their bodies, but they were able to earn a living, support their families, and put food on the table each night. They knew that because they were saving for retirement through their pensions, they would be taken care of in later years, they would be able to enjoy their later years hunting and fishing with their grandchildren, and they would be able to enjoy their later years by taking care of their family and their loved ones. Unfortunately, that security is evaporating.

I recently met with Teamsters and union workers and retirees in Bismark and Fargo. Quite honestly, their stories were heartbreaking. They couldn't understand how, if they did everything right, their retirement could be taken away from them. They can't live in a country that just enables these work-

ers and retirees to be left behind. They can't understand who was fighting for them.

They and we must stand up and say: This is wrong. We must stand up for hard work, and we must protect their pensions and make sure all North Dakotans have a secure retirement.

I want to tell just a few of their stories today. I will start with Dennis Gainsforth from Jamestown. He worked for UPS for 31 years. He needs surgery on one of his knees because of working decades as a night mechanic. Dennis is also helping financially take care of his son, who had a stroke, and his wife, who needs back surgery. Under the proposed cuts, his pension would be slashed by 50 percent. As a result, Dennis, who is 72 years old, is now back at work driving a public bus in Jamestown.

Tina Kramer from Mandan was a member of the Teamsters. She worked as a secretary for the local union for 25 years, throughout which time she earned a pension. Her husband was a member of the steelworkers union and worked for Bobcat for about 30 years as a forklift driver. He also earned a pension. Several years ago, both of them retired, and soon after, Tina's husband suddenly passed away. Tina lost her husband's pension and now has to rely solely on her pension. Under these proposed cuts, Tina's pension would be cut by almost 60 percent. Tina has just a little bit of savings, which she has already had to dip into every month to pay her bills and for groceries and to pay her property taxes. Under the proposed pension cuts, it could only get worse for Tina.

Bob Berg, from just north of Fargo, worked at UPS for over 30 years delivering packages, many of which could weigh up to 150 pounds. Because of the hard labor of his job, he had surgery on both knees, his hands, five hernia operations, and back problems, forcing him into early retirement. Now his medical bills are skyrocketing. He receives \$2,200 a month under the pension plan, but with the cuts, he would receive just \$1,150, which is a 50-percent reduction.

Mark Rothschiller from Mandan worked as a UPS driver for 28 years delivering packages to rural communities in North Dakota. Because of the intensity of his job, he had five back surgeries and two rotator cuff surgeries. After the last surgery, Mark's doctor told him to stop working or he might lose his ability to walk. He now walks with a cane. He relies on his pension—the pension that he earned—to help pay his medical bills. Under the proposed cuts, Mark's pension would be cut by more than 50 percent.

You hear these stories about men and women who worked hard all their lives and who did the right thing. They bargained for a pension because they knew the work they did was not work you could do your entire life, and they knew they wanted time in retirement to enjoy their golden years. Yet, today, the benefit they earned and that security is threatened.

I had a man approach me after one of the meetings where I asked people to tell me what the impacts were from the cuts, and many were able to give public testimonials. This man came up to me afterward, and I won't use his name because quite privately he wanted to tell me that he was going to lose his house, that he was going to lose all the security he had in the world, and that he was a grandfather helping to take care of his grandchildren because his daughter couldn't afford daycare.

These pension cuts don't affect just the worker, they affect the worker's family, they affect the extended family, and, quite honestly, they affect our communities. But more than that, they affect our general sense of security, our general sense that you ought to be able to rely on the goodness of your hard work and on the rewards of your hard work. Today, all of that is being threatened.

Some might say: Well, that is just the way it is. Pension funds are in trouble.

I want everyone to remember that many of these workers were basically prevented from managing their pension fund. In fact, the Federal Government took it away, took that pension fund away and gave it to private investment firms that squandered and wasted the principal. These workers wonder why in the world, in a country where we would bail out Wall Street bankers who made bad decisions, they never get listened to.

We cannot let this happen. I have been pressing Treasury Secretary Lew about this issue, and I recently met with Ken Feinberg, the Treasury official overseeing the reconstruction of this pension fund. We have to reinforce this point. We had a good conversation, and I hope the Treasury Department does the right thing by rejecting this devastating proposal and seeking a fairer option. We can and must find a solution that doesn't jeopardize retirement security or present long-term insolvency issues to the Central States Pension Fund.

This deal has threatened the livelihood of so many of my fellow North Dakotans, people who work hard for a living, the kind of people we brag about on floor of the Senate, whom we are here to represent—the hard-working, good Americans who build our country. Yet when this happens, they wonder who is listening to them. Who do we really represent here?

This deal has to be rejected. We have to create an opportunity that enables all North Dakotan and American families to have the secure retirement they have earned. Dennis, Tina, Bob, Mark, and so many other North Dakotans whom I have met deserve as much. They deserve the same kind of consideration and interest that we gave to AIG and all of the organizations we bailed out during the 2008 crisis at a time when we saw record bonuses for Wall Street executives. We wonder all the time why people are mad. We don't