

still play sports, and he can still dress himself.

For most of us who have had healthy children, these are the things that people take for granted. So for a family where one of their sons has Duchenne, this kind of small victory can seem like a miracle. I can't even imagine how hard it must be when a mother has two or three children—two or three sons—with this disease, and especially when one of her children can get access to an experimental drug and the other cannot.

The family looks at it. One son is being helped, and the other is not being helped. They can see the difference in their sons. So how would any of us here in the Senate react if we were in that same situation? How much heartbreak should one family have to bear? Those are the challenges for families who live with muscle disease every day.

Well, the FDA, I believe, needs to work with patients like Austin and Max. We all know that this agency needs to make sure that treatments are safe and effective. That is not a question. We also know that people at the FDA are caring and careful professionals. The practice of medicine relies on hard science and on following data to understand and to treat illnesses.

As a doctor, I know that the practice of medicine requires an equal measure of compassion. I think the FDA needs to take into account the unique needs of this patient population. We talk about double-blind studies, where you give one patient the real treatment and one patient something else, a sugar pill, something else that is not really the real treatment, the real medication.

To really evaluate the impact of these medications, sometimes it involves doing muscle biopsies and putting people through painful tests. I think it is hard for a family living with a child with muscle disease to say: Well, we are going to participate in the experiment. We don't know. It is a 50-50 chance if our child is even going to get the real thing. But we still put them through all of these tests that can be painful, as they take muscle biopsies.

I think it is unrealistic to ask a family to make that decision. I think we need to make sure that the FDA—and the FDA needs to make sure, in their compassion—doesn't lose sight of these kids. These young people really don't have a moment to lose in terms of potential treatments. I think the FDA needs to hear the calls of patients and to give these young people, living with a devastating disease, a chance to beat Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

#### VOTE-BY-MAIL

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to warn of a gathering threat to American's most fundamental con-

stitutional right; that is, the right to vote. Fifty-one years ago, President Johnson urged the Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act. In the face of implacable opposition from Southern States, President Johnson laid out the stakes. He said:

Every American must have an equal right to vote. There is no excuse which can excuse the denial of that right. There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right.

Sadly, half a century after that law began to remove the most offensive obstacles to voting, Americans now face new barriers to exercising their fundamental right to vote. Across our land, there are stories of long lines, inexplicable purges of voter rolls, and new requirements that make it still harder for our people to vote. There is absolutely no excuse for accepting this sorry state of affairs.

There is no excuse for citizens in Arizona to wait 5 hours to cast their ballot. There is no excuse for citizens in Rhode Island to find two out of every three polling places have closed. There is no excuse whatsoever for poor communities and minority communities across America to see their polling places shuttered.

Seniors and disabled Americans should not have to wait in long lines or struggle to reach polling places in America. Working parents should not have to choose between going to work and going to vote. Voting should not be a test of endurance. It should not be a Kafkaesque experience in defeating bureaucracy and wading through redtape. Increasingly, too many voters show up at the polls on election day, only to find that their name—somehow, magically—has gone missing from the voter rolls or their ID does not meet some new, even more burdensome, even more restrictive requirement.

There is no excuse for our government to turn away citizens and to say their vote does not count because of a clerical error or an unjust technicality. These grossly unfair obstacles have sprouted like weeds across our country ever since the Supreme Court overturned large portions of the Voting Rights Act in 2013. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, just this year, 17 States have passed new laws or rules to make it harder for their citizens to vote.

Let me repeat that. Seventeen States in America, just this year, have passed new laws, new rules, and new hurdles for our people who want to vote. Thankfully, there is a solution. My home State of Oregon has led the country in making voting more accessible. In Oregon, every voter receives a ballot 2 or 3 weeks before election day. Ballots should be arriving in mailboxes across the State over the next few days. Every Oregonian has ample time to research candidates and issues.

Rather than waiting in long lines, Oregonians can mail their ballot back or drop it off at ballot collection sites, many of which are open 24/7. Nobody

has to take time off from work just to exercise his or her constitutional right.

So let me repeat. In our State, we have made this work. Every voter gets a ballot 2 or 3 weeks before an election date. Now, vote-by-mail is not going to stop every State legislature in America from devising new ways to suppress voter turnout. Certainly, some State officials in our country have worked very hard to dream up new ways to limit the franchise.

But here is why the Oregon antidote is so important. If there is a problem, our State gives voters more time to fight back. When Americans have 2 or 3 weeks to vote, they will have more time to challenge registration problems. There is more time for citizens to defend their rights.

Oregon has been voting by mail since I was first elected to the Senate in 1996, and we went to all vote-by-mail in 2000. Since then, we have had consistently higher voter turnout rates than other parts of the country. We have consistently had voter turnout rates that are among the highest in the Nation.

Oregon voting rates are especially high among young people and in midterm elections. As an added benefit—this should appeal to all Senators—studies have shown that it saves money, to boot. So you have a system that voters like, gives them more time to reflect, is more efficient, and saves money, to boot. That is a pretty appealing trifecta, it seems to me, for democracy. So my proposition today is that the rest of the country ought to follow Oregon's lead, and all Americans, from one end of the country to another, ought to have the chance to vote by mail.

To me, this just is common sense. In fact, over the years, there were questions about who benefited from vote-by-mail? In fact, Oregonians put it on the ballot, because they said that everybody benefits from it. There was support all across the political spectrum. So today, I rolled out a new proposal for a national vote-by-mail. It is built on the Oregon system. The plan is simple. Every voter in a Federal election will receive a ballot in the mail.

The Federal Government, through the Postal Service, would assist States with the cost of mailing ballots to registered voters. States can keep their current polling practices if they wish. But those States that choose a full vote-by-mail system are going to see their election costs drop and drop significantly. My hope is that this proposal ignites a new campaign across the country to make it easier, not harder, for Americans to vote.

Vote-by-mail is a first step in fighting back against those who would disenfranchise their fellow citizens to gain a political edge.

For instance, in my view it also ought to be easier for Americans to register to vote. Again, my home State leads the way. Since January, every eligible voter is automatically registered to vote, eliminating extra trips to the

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.