

Thanks to courageous people like Debbie Smith, for whom we have named the Debbie Smith Act, as well as great bipartisan cooperation in the Senate, we have provided funding for the testing of rape kits at the State and local level, which has been supplemented by the Texas Legislature and other State legislatures.

In Houston a few years ago, our mayor felt so strongly about this that they took this on as a citywide project, with incredible results. They found a number of hits of previously unsolved crimes, and they were able to bring peace of mind to a lot of people who had been living under a cloud of unsolved crime when they processed these unprocessed rape kits.

Nationally, the problem is still big, with as many as 175,000 rape kits that still haven't been analyzed, and this is something we need to continue to attack. It is down from 400,000 at one point, was the estimate, down to 175,000, but that is still unacceptable.

Victims of sexual assault, scarred by painful memories and physical trauma, can't afford to wait for funding that is easier to come by. They need their stories to be heard, the evidence to be tested, and the results expedited. Federal, State, and local officials owe them those things. If we dawdle, those cases go cold, and they are the ones who bear the scars and the pain of these unresolved crimes.

That is why the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting Act, called the SAFER Act, is so important. That is the bill I mentioned a moment ago that we passed in the Senate on Monday. It reauthorizes a program created in 2013 that has helped law enforcement reduce the national rape kit backlog. I thank my friend and colleague, Representative TED POE over in the House, for sponsoring the House version.

The original legislation increased the amount of funds spent on untested kits by 35 percent and allowed 5 to 7 percent of them to be used on audits of existing law enforcement programs. These audits, in turn, uncovered tens of thousands of untested kits across the country, each with evidence that could be used to bring an offender to justice. The new bill passed by the Senate this week goes further. It ensures that pediatric forensic nurses are available for training so that, once they complete it, they are better equipped to respond promptly and appropriately to children suffering from abuse.

Finally, the bill extends the sunset provision of the SAFER Program, which will ensure the longevity of a program with a proven history of success.

I am grateful to have a wide range of bipartisan support, including the senior Senator from Minnesota, as well as the senior Senators from Nevada and Colorado, who are original cosponsors. This is a good example of legislation that is bipartisan and that makes progress toward solving a very real problem in our country. But, as so

often we find the case, there is not much reporting on it, much attention paid, but it is worth noting here on the Senate floor that bipartisan progress on important legislation that helps people's lives become better is being done here in the Senate.

CORRECTIONS ACT

Mr. President, I also want to bring up another important piece of legislation I reintroduced this last week, the Corrections Oversight, Recidivism Reduction, and Eliminating Cost to Taxpayers in Our National System Act. Let me call it the CORRECTIONS Act for short because that is a mouthful. I am grateful to my Democratic cosponsor, the junior Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, for joining me on what is, like the SAFER Act, significant bipartisan legislation.

My home State of Texas has a well-deserved reputation for being tough on crime, but we have also learned over time that it is important to be smart on crime too. We successfully implemented statewide criminal justice reforms that help low-risk offenders become productive members of society once they reenter civil society from prison, and the State is focused on the important role rehabilitation can play.

I am not naive enough to think that every person who is imprisoned behind bars, having been convicted of a criminal offense, is going to take advantage of the opportunity to right their path and to get on with their life, but some will, and given the proper assessments and incentives, we have found that this sort of approach works.

The CORRECTIONS Act that Senator WHITEHOUSE and I have introduced builds off of the State models that have worked in Rhode Island, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, and elsewhere, and it requires the Bureau of Prisons to provide programs that partner with faith-based and community-based organizations to better prepare these men and women to become law-abiding and active members of society. I hope the Senate can follow Texas's lead and implement these commonsense, bipartisan reforms.

This bill achieves a number of objectives, which I will mention briefly.

First, it requires the Department of Justice to develop risk-assessment tools to evaluate the recidivism potential of all eligible offenders.

Second, it refocuses resources on those offenders most likely to commit future crimes and allows lower risk inmates to serve their sentences under less restrictive conditions, thus reducing prison costs, so the taxpayer wins too.

Third, the bill expands programming—such as substance abuse treatment and vocational training—that has been proven to reduce recidivism.

Fourth, it requires the Bureau of Prisons to foster partnerships with faith-based and nonprofit and community-based organizations in order to deliver a broad spectrum of programming to prisoners.

Next, it allows inmates who successfully complete recidivism-reduction programs to earn credit toward time in prerelease custody, while eliminating eligibility for inmates convicted of serious crimes.

Additionally, the bill requires the Department of Justice to implement inmate reentry pilot projects across the country and to study their effects so that we can gain a better understanding of what works and what doesn't work when it comes to offenders' reintegration into society.

Finally, the CORRECTIONS Act creates a national commission to review every aspect of our criminal justice system. The last review of this type was done in 1965. And while I think Congress—certainly this is within our wheelhouse, but we probably don't have the bandwidth to do this, which is why this national commission is so important to be able to report back to Congress and make recommendations to us.

We know one thing for sure: that when people serve their sentence and they are released from prison, they are going to reenter society. Why wouldn't we want to make sure those who are willing to deal with their addiction, to learn a skill, to get a GED, and to otherwise improve their lives—why wouldn't we want to make sure they are better prepared when they reenter civil society? Otherwise, they are left with this turnstile of crime where they go from prison, to the community, to committing another crime, to another conviction, and back to prison again.

Our focus should be on helping individuals find a productive path as contributing members of society, and that involves making sure returning to prison doesn't happen because there is no alternative. By implementing job training, drug rehabilitation, and mental health treatment, we can focus and save taxpayer dollars, lower crime and incarceration rates, decrease recidivism, and most importantly, we can help people change their own lives for the better.

Joining State and local officials at the forefront of this are groups like Prison Fellowship and the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which create programs for inmates, such as the Prison Entrepreneurship Program—or PEP for short—which teaches prisoners how to start and manage their own businesses when they begin life on the outside. You would be amazed by individuals who started their own businesses through the PEP program and turned their lives around in the process through the mentorship and fellowship that these programs provide.

I hope we can learn from the laboratories of democracy, known as the States, where we implemented successful criminal justice reform programs—this time, in our prison system—where we will all benefit. Taxpayers benefit because we will have to incarcerate fewer people because they won't continue this cycle of release, offend, and

reincarceration—at least a certain percentage of them won't. We can help people whose lives are in a tailspin because of drug or alcohol addiction or who feel as though they are on a dead-end street because they simply don't have the job skills or the education in order to compete in the economy.

I hope we can follow the lead of successful experiments in our States, such as Texas, and implement these commonsense, bipartisan reforms in our Federal prison system.

Mr. President, let me say in conclusion that I know the administration is very interested in engaging on criminal justice reform. Last year, we worked on a sentencing and prison reform bill that unfortunately seems to not be going anywhere. While the prison reform component of it seems to have a consensus of support here in the Congress and I think could pass and be signed into law, the sentencing reform piece is a little more controversial and I know divides even the Republican conference, and I am not sure what it does with the Democratic conference. But I believe we ought to start on a step-by-step basis, get what we can get done, and get it to the President for his signature, while providing these tools to inmates who are incarcerated through the Bureau of Prisons, and then keep working on the other parts on which we perhaps have not yet been able to build consensus.

I hope our colleagues will work with us on this important piece of legislation as we work to reform our criminal justice system in ways that make sense and that save taxpayer dollars.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

TAX REFORM

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, yesterday in the middle of the day, the Presiding Officer and I and the Senator from Texas and others had a chance to meet with the President and talk about tax relief. It seemed to me very clear that the President and those of us who are advocating tax cuts right now are on the same wavelength, which is, let's have tax cuts for hard-working families, and let's do the other things we need to do in the Tax Code to ensure that those very same families have better jobs.

As I said on the floor of the Senate last week, there are two ways to increase take-home pay. One is to start taking less out of the paychecks people are getting now, and another one is to give them an even better paycheck in the future. We need to look at both of those ways to increase the opportunity for working families and working individuals.

We are now into the eighth year of almost no economic growth. If there is no economic growth, there is very little incentive for your job to be a better paying job than it was the previous year no matter what has happened to your other costs, and we clearly see that happening.

We are into the first year of this new administration. We are looking at 3 percent annual growth after 8 years in which growth didn't exceed 2 percent. Anytime you begin to talk like an economist, people begin to wonder: Well, what does that have to do with me? Let me just say that for taxpayers generally, for working families generally, the more growth you have, one, the more revenue that comes in that takes care of problems like the deficit. The way you take care of those problems—the best way—is to grow the economy. Two, people are much more focused on keeping the workforce they have, getting the best of the workforce that is coming on board as their workforce moves on for retirement or relocates or does other things.

Three percent economic growth is not good enough. The post-World War II average—that is more than seven decades now of average—is, I think, almost 3½ percent. There are very few economic problems in our country that wouldn't be made substantially better, including our own Federal deficit, if we see growth exceed or even get to the 70-year average. There is no reason to believe that can't happen.

Yesterday, the President was talking about the two ways to immediately relieve pressures on families. One is more take-home pay, and two is a better job that also increases take-home pay. But the first step we can achieve immediately by the kind of tax relief we need.

There have been 8 years of stagnant wages. Half of the families in the country are living paycheck to paycheck. Very few families can face an emergency that is even \$500 without having to restructure what they are doing and how they are doing it. We can do a better job at this. We need more jobs. We need higher wages. And the two principal goals of this tax bill should be to do exactly that—create more wages now, more take-home pay now, and create an environment in which we are going to be more competitive. Simplifying the Tax Code is one way to meet that first impact, having a tax code that people understand better, that they think is fairer.

A tax code where people think they are being treated fairly is much more likely to be complied with than a tax code where people see that somebody else who makes the same amount of money as they make is paying a lot less taxes than they are paying. The American tax system is probably the greatest voluntary compliance. Sure, there are laws that require people to comply, but most people are never impacted by those laws. They know they could be, but the American people have shown a willingness to pay their fair share if they know that their fair share is, in fact, their fair share. A simpler tax system, a more easily understood tax system, a system that has fewer than the seven different tax brackets that people pay today are things we can and should achieve.

Doubling the standard deduction helps a lot when people look at the \$12,000 deduction they have now. For a couple, as they look at that deduction and realize that deduction, that standard deduction, has doubled, suddenly, if you are a couple filing jointly, you are not paying any taxes on the first \$24,000 you earn. If you are a single individual, you are not paying any taxes on the first \$12,000 you earn. Keeping enough of the family-benefiting exemptions helps make the family do what the family would like to do. What if they would like to give to their church and charity? There is no discussion saying we wouldn't keep the standard charitable deduction as a deduction. There is no discussion that we wouldn't keep home mortgage as a deduction so we are encouraging homeownership or looking at how to make the child tax credit bigger rather than smaller.

Many of the early analyses of what this Tax Code would do say that for a family of four, they would pay more than they are paying now up to certain income level. Generally, that will turn out not to be the case—certainly, at the middle-income levels and below if you factor in the child tax credit, which hasn't been determined yet.

Our tax-writing committee will be looking at that child tax credit as an important addition to the individual exemptions because it costs money to raise kids. The Congress surely should understand that, appreciate that, and factor that into the deductions. Just like we are doubling the deduction for individual earners, we also have to look at what that child tax credit should look like.

Tax policies that benefit homeownership, tax policies that encourage contributing to charities and community activities and church and synagogue and mosque—your religious activities—all would continue to be a part of this Tax Code.

Also, when talking about sending kids to school, one way to not have student debt is to encourage families to have ways to better prepare for what they, in most cases, would hope would be a goal or an expenditure their family would make. We can do things like expanding the Pell grants for poor families, but for families who don't qualify for that, we can do things that allow the deduction early on for putting money in a fund that prepares people to go to school.

Keeping well-paying jobs at home and encouraging more jobs to come here is also an important part of the goal. You can't have the highest corporate rate in the world and expect that you are going to be as competitive as you would be with other countries. A corporate rate of 35 percent, in 1986, was fairly near the middle when that rate was arrived at with President Reagan and others working on it the last time we did a tax rewrite, and right in the middle is about where we should be. However, now the situation is we see that right in the middle is no