

(E) if applicable, the name of the major disaster or emergency for which each contract was entered into or extended.

The committee-reported amendment, in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to.

The bill (S. 594), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION OFFICER RETIREMENT TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS ACT

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill (S. 727) to correct the inequitable denial of enhanced retirement and annuity benefits to certain U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers, which had been reported from the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs with an amendment to strike all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic, as follows:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer Retirement Technical Corrections Act”.

SEC. 2. ADJUSTMENT RELATED TO TRANSITION RULES.

(a) **DEFINED TERM.**—In this section the term “Eligible Individual” means any individual who—

(1) received a tentative offer of employment as a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer before July 6, 2008; and

(2) entered into duty as a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer on or after July 6, 2008, as a result of an offer described in paragraph (1).

(b) **TREATMENT OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.**—Eligible Individuals—

(1) are considered to be individuals serving as U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers on July 6, 2008, for purposes of section 535(e) of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2008 (division E of Public Law 110-161; 121 Stat. 1844); and

(2) are entitled to—

(A) the minimum annuity amount required under section 535(e)(2)(C) of such Act; and

(B) an exemption from mandatory retirement otherwise required under section 8425(b)(1) of title 5, United States Code.

(c) **IMPLEMENTATION.**—

(1) **SUBMISSION OF INFORMATION.**—Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall—

(A) create a list of all Eligible Individuals;

(B) notify each Eligible Individual of the annuity correction described in subsection (b); and

(C) provide the Director of the Office of Personnel Management with all of the information that is necessary for making annuity corrections with respect to Eligible Individuals.

(2) **COMPLETION OF ANNUITY CORRECTION.**—After receiving the information described in paragraph (1)(C), the Director of the Office of Personnel Management shall make the annuity correction described in subsection (b) with respect to each Eligible Individual, including a retroactive annuity adjustment for Eligible Individuals who retired before the date of the enactment of this Act.

(d) **WAIVERS AND GUIDANCE.**—

(1) **WAIVERS.**—The Secretary of Homeland Security may retroactively waive the maximum entry age requirement under 3307(g) of title 5, United States Code, to the extent necessary, to ensure that each Eligible Individual is eligible for immediate retirement with the annuity correction described in subsection (b).

(2) **GUIDANCE.**—The Director of the Office of Personnel Management, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall issue appropriate guidance to assist in the implementation of the annuity correction described in subsection (b).

(e) **GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE.**—The Comptroller General of the United States—

(1) shall review U.S. Customs and Border Protection (referred to in this subsection as “CBP”) hiring practices, policies, and procedures related to eligibility for enhanced retirement benefits referred to in this section by assessing—

(A) the process for determining whether an employee qualifies for such benefits, including considering any potential factors that would make an employee ineligible for such enhanced retirement benefits;

(B) the internal controls used by CBP to ensure that all eligible employees, and only eligible employees, receive such enhanced retirement benefits;

(C) the policies regarding the use of employees’ personnel files to ensure compliance with current laws governing retirement benefits; and

(D) the adequacy of the training provided to CBP senior executives regarding human resources and hiring practices at CBP; and

(2) not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, shall submit a report that describes the results of the review conducted pursuant to paragraph (1) to—

(A) the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate;

(B) the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives; and

(C) the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the House of Representatives.

The committee-reported amendment, in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to.

The bill (S. 727), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority whip.

FIRST STEP ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this December marks the seventh anniversary of the passage of the First Step Act, the most significant reform to our criminal justice system in a generation.

That victory was born out of years of bipartisan negotiations led by myself and my colleagues Senator CORY BOOKER of New Jersey, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY of Iowa, and Senator MIKE LEE of Utah—Democrats and Republicans working together. The end result was and continues to be life-changing for the people who were impacted.

The First Step Act delivered much needed reforms to our outdated sentencing laws and provided real opportunities for incarcerated Americans to safely reenter their communities. Those reforms have reduced populations in overcrowded prisons, reunited families, and revitalized communities these men and women reenter as productive neighbors. The evidence backs it up. Just look at the numbers.

Of the more than 40,000 people released under the law through January 2024, just under 10 percent have been rearrested—40,000, under 10 percent.

Compare that to the Bureau of Prisons’ overall recidivism rate, which is 45 percent. The difference between 10 percent and 45 percent is striking, and it shows what we can achieve when we are smart on crime and follow the data.

I want to take a moment to highlight the story of one woman from Alton, IL. So often in my congressional career, things that have inspired me come from stories of real people and real lives. This is one of them.

Her name was Eugenia Jennings. As a teenager, she, sadly, experienced the injustice of our antiquated sentencing laws firsthand. She was terribly abused as a child, and by age 15, Eugenia Jennings was addicted to crack cocaine. At age 23, as a mother of three, Eugenia was sentenced to over 20 years in Federal prison for selling less than 14 grams of a drug.

In prison, she turned out to be a model for others. She took all of the courses available to her, overcame her addiction, and talked to students about the dangers of drug addiction. Sadly, while she was incarcerated, she developed leukemia.

I asked President Barack Obama, my former colleague in the Senate, to commute Eugenia’s sentence, and he did just that. It was the first commutation he issued. Eugenia was released just in time to see her oldest daughter graduate from high school. I cannot tell you the joy in her voice when she told me that.

She passed away 2 years later, but her story has lived on and served as a driving force behind my efforts to reform our Federal drug sentencing laws.

Eugenia’s story led me to meet more individuals whose lives were forever altered by unfair sentencing laws, including Matthew Charles. Matthew also had a difficult childhood, enduring both physical and verbal abuse. He joined the Army at age 18 but found himself still filled with anger and hurt. He eventually turned to what he called wayward living and selling drugs. He received a State conviction and then a Federal conviction. Because he had a prior conviction when he ended up in Federal court because he had been selling crack rather than powdered cocaine, Matthew received a sentence of 35 years—35 years.

While in prison, he worked as a GED tutor and law library clerk in addition to mentoring young people. He helped other incarcerated individuals who could not read to understand their letters and court documents, and he drafted filings for them. In 21 years in prison, Matthew did not receive a single disciplinary infraction.

After Matthew’s conviction and sentence, Congress passed a law I wrote called the Fair Sentencing Act, which reduced the disparity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine offenses, but the law was not retroactive. When Eugenia and Matthew were sentenced, the hands of their sentencing judges were tied because Congress severely limited a judge’s discretion to

impose an individualized sentence and, instead, mandated overly harsh, one-size-fits-all penalties.

The First Step Act took one giant step toward correcting that unfair system. Among other reforms, it made the Fair Sentencing Act retroactive. Matthew Charles was one of the first people released from prison after the First Step Act became law.

But, as the name of the First Step Act suggests, it is just that, one first step. There is more to be done. To make our system fairer and our communities safer, we need to continue to reform our sentencing laws in a smart way. That is why Senator GRASSLEY and I reintroduced a package of bipartisan bills to expand on the progress of the First Step Act.

One of those bills is the First Step Implementation Act, which is legislation, among other things, that would retroactively apply the First Step Act sentencing reforms to sentences imposed before the law's passage. This would impact people like Matthew Charles, who was sentenced before Congress reformed outdated statutes.

People like Eugenia and Matthew deserve a second chance. The First Step Implementation Act would make redemption for more individuals likely impossible. The First Step Act's passage was a glimmer of bipartisanship in a political arena that has become increasingly polarized. It was signed into law by President Trump in his first term. This success shows what we can accomplish on behalf of the American people when we put aside our political differences, when we come to the table with reasonable approaches.

We need evidence-backed solutions to reduce crime and make our communities safer.

So, as we celebrate the seventh anniversary, I will continue to work with my colleagues to reform outdated sentencing laws. Let's rekindle the spirit of bipartisanship and get something done in the Senate. I call on my colleagues to support the Grassley-Durbin legislation, the First Step Implementation Act. Together, we can reduce crime, improve our justice system, and make America's communities safer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, before my colleague leaves the floor, I just want to commend him for his leadership and for that of some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, like LINDSEY GRAHAM and MIKE LEE, who were extraordinary in getting this done.

When I got to the Senate about 12 years ago, one of the best experiences I have had as a Senator was to have the senior Senator, who in many ways, to me, was a legend, put me under his wing and say: Join me in this effort, in this fight. It gave me one of the best, most gratifying legislative experiences I have had as a U.S. Senator.

On this the seventh anniversary, I just want to herald the leadership of

DICK DURBIN for never giving up, for his indomitable will, and for his invincible spirit in getting this major piece of legislation done.

I am grateful to be able to stand here today, 7 years later, to thank him for that kind of leadership as well as my colleagues in the Republican Party who stood strong, who stood with us, and helped us get over this line. This is the kind of thing that is a real example of setting political differences aside and doing what is right. There were people in the White House, not just President Trump but many of his team members, who enabled us to work together to get something done.

It shows what we can do when we let evidence, facts, fairness, and compassion be the guide to getting legislation done. This is not only a reflection of what we have done; to me, it should inspire us to what we can do. For 7 years, this landmark legislation has represented the crowning achievement in this body.

First, I want to remind everybody that, in the years leading up to this, our prison population in America ballooned by 800 percent. America became the incarceration capital of planet Earth, with 5 percent of the world's population but 25 percent of the world's prison population. Even today, close to one out of every three adult Americans has a criminal record. That is stunning, and it should stun everybody here, but we know we were able to make some changes and not by accident. This system—this corrupt system—is a result of decades of failed Federal policies that we challenged; that we showed did not work.

My friend Bryan Stevenson put it perfectly. He said that you get treated better in this country if you are rich and guilty rather than if you are poor and innocent. That is why so many of us worked together to get something done.

As of January 31, 2024, over 17,000 individuals were released from residential reentry centers, home confinements, and secure facilities because they participated in the programming to help them reenter society and earn credits. The great thing about it is their recidivism rate is so much lower than it would have been from comparable populations that maxed out their time. We have, actually, through the programs we have put in place, made people safer; have lowered recidivism rates; have created safer communities and stronger, more intact families through this program. Over 400,000 people now have completed programs that were put together in our legislation. In fiscal year 2023, over 4,000 people completed occupational training, and over 8,000 earned industry-recognized credentials.

So much good has come from this, but as Senator DURBIN said, our work is not done. We know that the Bureau of Prisons has a staffing crisis that jeopardizes the safety of correctional officers and those in custody, and that

undermines the programs we have put in place, which are not being fully implemented.

When we named the law, we also were very deliberate. We called it the First Step Act because we knew there was so much more work that we could be doing in a bipartisan way to empower our criminal justice system to be about justice and fairness and public safety, not just the routine warehousing of human beings and human potential at great cost to taxpayers.

Perhaps one of the great public safety things we can do is to continue this work. We must not succumb to the dangerous rhetoric that spreads fear for political gain and does not look at the commonsense, evidence-based ways to lower crime, to lower prison rates, to empower communities, and to reunite families. We must not brand every person who commits an offense as someone who is irredeemable. Indeed, the very nature of our country is the ideal of redemption.

I am so grateful to have participated in the First Step Act. I see my friend MIKE LEE, who just came in, who is another one of those champions whom I mentioned earlier by name. Now that he is on the floor, I want to thank him for his courage, for his telling the stories of people over and over again until the consciousness of the country was raised to the point at which we could get this legislation done.

Again, it is one of the best experiences I have had as a legislator. I want to thank him, Senator DURBIN, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, as well as my friend LINDSEY GRAHAM, and many of our colleagues on this side of the aisle.

I know the hour is late, and a lot of my friends are waiting here, but I am hoping that, in the spirit of this anniversary, we can commit ourselves to doubling our efforts and doing more good work in this spirit.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). The Senator from Alaska.

HOUSE BILLS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, we are here on the floor, a number of Senators from both sides of the aisle, trying to move some important legislation for all of us, our different States, and different constituencies.

I have spoken a lot on this bill—my bill—the Alaska Native Vietnam Era Veterans Land Allotment Extension Act. So I am going to keep this quick. I will talk about this more, hopefully, once we get to a positive resolution.

I do want to just thank my colleagues. A lot of people are working hard on this. I want to thank my legislative director Erik Elam, Senators KING, PADILLA, BENNET, HOEVEN, and Senator-Chairman LEE—a lot of hard work, a lot of cooperation, on both sides of the aisle. I appreciate very much the cooperation. I think we will get to a good outcome here, and then we will make more commitments to