

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 This would impact people like Matthew Charles, who was sentenced before Congress reformed outdated statutes.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So, as we celebrate the seventh anniversary, I will continue to work with my colleagues to reform outdated sentencing laws.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

help each other. That is what this body has long been about.

All the Senators on the floor, I have the deepest respect for. As I will say later, I have said on the floor many times: This is an issue for some great constituents of mine—what I refer to as special patriotism, Alaska Native Vietnam vets. Alaska Native people serve at higher rates in the military than any other ethnic group in the country.

This is going to be a good outcome, I hope, that addresses some of their challenges. I will talk in more detail about it.

Mr. President, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the following bills en bloc: H.R. 131, H.R. 187, H.R. 410, and H.R. 1043.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to proceeding to the measures en bloc?

The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I just want to raise a few concerns before we pass these four House bills. We have developed a new process in this Congress where, instead of passing a large public lands package, we are moving packages of smaller bills simultaneously.

But for this new process to work, not only does the Senate need to pass House bills, but the House should be passing Senate bills. This Congress, the Senate has passed so far five House bills under the jurisdiction of our Energy and Natural Resources Committee by unanimous consent. All of them have been signed into law.

During the same period, four bills from our committee—from our Energy and Natural Resources Committee—have passed the Senate by unanimous consent but are being held at the desk in the House and have neither been referred to committee nor taken up for a vote.

And these are bipartisan bills. One is sponsored by Senator CORNYN, one by Senator LANKFORD, one by myself, and one by Senator HICKENLOOPER.

So the picture is, we are passing the House bills, but they are not reciprocating and passing the bills that we have sent them from this Chamber. It is not sustainable for us to continue to do our side of the bargain and not have a response from the House when they refuse to even take up the bill.

So the Senate has given the House the courtesy of taking up their bills, passing them in a previous group, as I mentioned, and now this group of House bills that we are going to be passing this afternoon. All I am asking is that the House extend to this body the same courtesy that we have extended to them.

So this is about mutual respect and comity, and in the spirit of comity, I look forward to working with Chairman LEE and Chairman WESTERMAN,

and we can resolve these concerns in the new year.

Mr. President, noting my reservations, I do not object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from California.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, as the Senator from Alaska, the Senator from Utah, and others know, I have been down here many times as we tried to work through a better way of ensuring that we have a fair and bipartisan and bicameral approach to passing these public lands bills.

The Senator from Maine just articulated one of the concerns about the Senate passing House bills or the House passing the Senate bills. Let me be a little bit more blunt and direct, because I don't think we are quite there yet, but I do think we are seeing the beginning of a more equitable process developing.

I was encouraged to see that, just earlier today, a Senate Republican bill and a Senate Democratic bill were packaged together as a single bill and sent over to the House. I think this approach is critical to ensuring that neither the House of Representatives nor the White House can discriminate against our Democratic priorities.

So I hope that we are now going to see action on the House side on that bill and other Senate Democratic bills, like that of my colleague from Maine, that we have sent over.

Therefore, as a gesture of good faith, I will not object to the passage of these four bills today, but I want to be very clear—I want to be clear with my colleagues in this body and our colleagues in the House of Representatives—that I will not consent to any additional House Republican public lands bills passing the Senate until the House passes and the White House signs into law these Senate Democratic bills.

Good faith must go both ways. I think it is critical that all interested Senators have an opportunity to sit down, when we return in January, with the leadership of both the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee to finally hammer out what that fair, bipartisan, and bicameral approach to passing public lands bills will be.

Now, I also acknowledge—and this may be a little insight for folks watching from home—that this year we have welcomed a new chair, in the Senate, of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, along with a new ranking member. On the House side, in the House Natural Resources Committee—which, Mr. President, you are very familiar with—the chairman there is not new, but as I understand it, given the rules of the Republican conference in the House, he is in his last session as chair, and there will soon be a new chair in the years ahead. There is a new ranking member of that committee in the House as well.

So as there has been this transition of leadership in both Chambers in these two very important committees, I think it is even more timely to bring the leadership together with interested Senators to hammer out what the understanding will be to establish a fair, bipartisan, and bicameral approach to the consideration and approval of public lands bills.

In that effort, I would appeal to our colleague from Alaska to help facilitate such a convening and the development of such an understanding and plan for going forward.

So with my concerns being articulated and my request and suggested path forward being on the record now, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I do have a hold on one of the bills in this package. It is not the bill that Senator SULLIVAN is talking about. It is one of the other bills. But I do have a hold on one of the bills.

And it is because there are holds on the Democratic side on one of my priorities in the jurisdiction of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. That is S. 675, which is the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Museum Artifacts Act. This bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent last year.

I will try that one more time. The bill I am talking about passed the Senate by unanimous consent last year. Now, there are holds on it.

It is the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, and it is scheduled to open on July 4, 2026, in concert with the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The library will honor our Nation's 26th President and ensure that future generations of Americans can access the rich history and enduring impact of President Roosevelt.

As President Roosevelt proudly claimed, he would not have ascended to the Presidency had it not been for his formative years in my State, North Dakota. President Roosevelt first traveled to the Dakota Territory in 1883 to hunt bison and returned in 1884, while mourning the passing of both his wife and his mother. President Roosevelt called the Dakota Territory home for 3 years, while enjoying the vast beauty that the Badlands have to offer.

Fittingly, the Roosevelt Library will be located adjacent to the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. My legislation would authorize funding for the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library for continued construction and the preservation of President Roosevelt's history and his legacy. This funding would be contingent on matching funds from non-Federal sources.

The measure also authorizes inter-agency agreements to allow for the exhibition of collections associated with Theodore Roosevelt that are currently

in the custody of the Federal Government.

As I said, there are, unfortunately, Democrat holds on this noncontroversial, bipartisan—bipartisan—legislation. Now, my understanding is that these holds are unrelated—unrelated—to the legislation itself.

While I do have a hold on one of the bills in the package, I will acknowledge now that Senator BENNET has been working with me to help clear the holds on my Roosevelt Library bill, and I want to express my appreciation for his help, and I look forward to continuing to work with him.

So, therefore, at his request and in the spirit of good faith, I will not object at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bills en bloc.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bills, en bloc, be considered read a third time.

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

The bills were ordered to a third reading and were read the third time en bloc.

Mr. SULLIVAN. I know of no further debate on the bills en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the bills having been read the third time en bloc, the question is, Shall the bills pass en bloc?

The bills were passed en bloc as follows:

FINISH THE ARKANSAS VALLEY CONDUIT ACT

The bill (H.R. 131) to make certain modifications to the repayment for the Arkansas Valley Conduit in the State of Colorado, was passed.

MODERNIZING ACCESS TO OUR PUBLIC WATERS ACT OF 2025

The bill (H.R. 187) to provide for the standardization, consolidation, and publication of data relating to public outdoor recreational use of Federal waterways among Federal land and water management agencies, and for other purposes, was passed.

ALASKA NATIVE VIETNAM ERA VETERANS LAND ALLOTMENT EXTENSION ACT OF 2025

The bill (H.R. 410) to extend the Alaska Native Vietnam era veterans land allotment program, and for other purposes, was passed.

LA PAZ COUNTY SOLAR ENERGY AND JOB CREATION ACT

A bill (H.R. 1043) to direct the Secretary of the Interior to convey certain Federal land in Arizona to La Paz County, Arizona, and for other purposes, was passed.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, all en bloc.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I would like to thank Senator SULLIVAN from Alaska for helping to get us all to the floor here today. I would like to thank Chairman LEE for his leadership getting us here, Ranking Member HEINRICH, and Senators KING and HOEVEN and PADILLA. Thank you to Senator HOEVEN for his kind words.

We are working together to try to make progress, and I want to thank my team for working well with his on this as well.

I am not going to go on for a long time today, but I do want to talk about the Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act, which just passed the floor of the Senate, and the bipartisan effort to get this bill done and get it to the President's desk.

Over six decades ago, President John Kennedy came to Pueblo, CO, and famously promised to build the Arkansas Valley Conduit. It is the last component of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project, a Federal water diversion and storage project that Congress approved in 1962.

Once completed, the Arkansas Valley Conduit will deliver clean water to over 50,000 people in 39 rural communities across southeastern Colorado. That is why for over a decade, across Republican and Democratic administrations, I have worked to secure over \$500 million to ensure that the Federal Government keeps its word and that we finish the conduit.

Unfortunately, due to recent increases in pipe and labor costs, the total cost of the conduit has nearly doubled. This has created a huge challenge for local communities, many of whom currently rely on contaminated groundwater for their water supply.

Our bill, based on the great work of the Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, takes this affordability crisis head-on, cutting local costs by lowering the interest rate and providing more flexible repayment terms. This is a commonsense solution to ensure that southeast Colorado can afford safe and reliable drinking water.

This legislation costs the American taxpayer nothing, but it would pay dividends for 50,000 people in southeastern Colorado, and it would fulfill a decades—many decades—old promise on which they have relied.

I am glad the House and Senate have acted unanimously to pass this legislation, and I look forward to the President now signing this bill into law.

I want to say again to my colleague from Maine how much I appreciate his willingness to be able to, in the spirit of bipartisan compromise, withdraw his objection to this package as well, and I look forward to working with him to

pass the bills he has said are so critical not just to Maine but to this Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I want to thank my friend and colleague the senior Senator from Colorado for his outstanding work on this, for working with me and my team. I am glad that we were able to make this a success. It is my hope and my intent that this will not be the end but the beginning of a much bigger pattern of success. It is a good example of the kind of legislation we ought to pass every time we get the chance. When we have bills that are uncontroversial, we can get them passed.

Sometimes these bills are held up not in spite of the fact that they are noncontroversial but because they are noncontroversial—because we want to couple them with other legislation that may be less popular.

We have heard some observations today, some concerns expressed about the ability, once we pass legislation over here, to get it passed over on the House side. There are a couple of things I think we ought to take note of that should give us hope on this.

In the first place, the way legislation like this works on the House side—they don't have the 60-vote cloture standard that we have in the Senate, but with these lands bills, they tend to pass them under a procedure known in the House as suspension of the rules.

Under suspension of the rules, it requires them to be passed with 290 votes instead of 218. Because of the way that works, it ends up yielding a similar outcome to how it works over here. They tend to be able to enhance their ability to pass those under the suspension calendar if they bring them to the floor while paired with other bills—not surgically stitched together so it is the same legislation, but they bring them forward for procedural consideration in the House on the floor, resulting in an approximate number of noncontroversial Republican and Democratic bills passing regardless of who happens to be in the majority at the time.

My friend and colleague the distinguished Senator from California had mentioned a moment ago concerns about that process over in the House, but I will remind him that at the end of the last Congress, he and I had several bills that were brought together and passed through the procedure that I am describing on the floor and that were passed into law by the House of Representatives after that.

Although, under certain circumstances, two separate bill sponsors of two separate bills may choose to merge, surgically stitch their bills into one bill, there are downsides to that too, and it certainly ought not be that without which, not passing legislation in the Senate—they ought to be able to stand on their own.

I, for one, am happy—particularly within the range of this type of bill