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Virginia, the Virginia Legislature passed a law in 2000, enabling certain ex-felons to apply to the circuit court for the restoration of their voting rights, five years after the completion of their sentence. Those convicted of felony drug offenses must wait seven years after completion. The circuit court's decisions are subject to the Governor's approval. In Wyoming, in March 2003, the Governor signed a bill to allow people convicted of a nonviolent first-time felony to apply for restoration of voting rights, again, five years after completion of their sentence. I support Senator Smith's amendment in trying to make this a better bill. But I do not support this bill.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator. Senator Smith, on your amendment.

SENATOR SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President and members. I learned this morning, reading the newspaper, that the Pardons Board actually is working toward a plan of expediting pardons for voting rights in three years. So that, I'm sure, is going to move forward, regardless of what we do, perhaps, unless it's just this automatic zero if the committee amendments would for some reason fail; zero waiting time. But it disturbs me greatly when there are comments made that everything is back to normal upon the completion of a sentence. It's not. Ask a victim's family. Ask a victim, if you can. I believe that this is part of an effort of opening up voting that's based on political reasons. And that's fine. This is politics, and that's what it's about. But a five-year waiting period addresses recidivism, and hopefully prevents that, hopefully gives a period of time so that an ex-offender will not reoffend. That's what our goal needs to be. It's reasonable. Senator Fischer pointed out what other states do. This is not abnormal. A two-year waiting period basically doesn't even make sure that someone doesn't vote in the next presidential election. I value those voting rights, and it's something that any responsible citizen should do. But we also have a system in place that recognizes when some rights should be taken away. And this isn't even taking away rights forever; it extends the waiting period. Thank you, Mr. President.