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February 9, 2005 LB 53

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Senator Smith.

SENATOR SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President and members. I rise in opposition to LB 53 as amended by the committee amendments. And it goes back to the fact that I think we could have a better bill, perhaps. But more than that, I'm concerned that there is an attitude that there are no victims of crime, certainly no long-term victims, that it's all short-term, and when the completion of a sentence occurs, all scars to the victim go away as well. Now, the sex offender registry is a punishment, if you will, that exists beyond the end of a sentence, unless you want to consider that as part of the sentence as well, as part of the time frame. But LB 53, I think, is unreasonable in saying that voting rights are automatically restored. My concern about the bill, as I just stated, has to do with victims. But it also has to do with our election system. And I think this is nothing more than an effort to recruit a few more voters and help determine the outcome of an election. So be it. That's part of the political process. I just do not want to contribute to that. And when we think about the scars to a victim of a violent crime--and I don't want to even be graphic about a violent crime. But there are a lot of felons who serve their sentence. And I'm glad they're reformed. I'm very glad. In fact, it reminds me of a ministry called Prison Fellowship, probably one of the most successful programs in prisons, in terms of reforming criminals. They reduce recidivism among their participants I think by some 60 percent. It's a great program. I think we should get behind that more as public policy, and support that effort, because Prison Fellowship makes a difference. But when you look at the bigger picture of the completion of a sentence and things automatically going back to normal, I wish they could, I wish they would, but they don't. And I think it's very reasonable to maintain our current system, and especially when the Pardons Board is looking at a three-year expedited system of restoring voting rights. That's reasonable. In fact, they could even do that quicker than the two-year waiting period if they wanted to. And it happens. There are a lot of folks who pursue a pardon even without an attorney. It's not expensive. It's not difficult. It takes a little time and effort, but I think a little time and effort is very reasonable