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LB 53

to allow that ex-felon to get integrated back into the society, and to be responsible in his or her voting habits. I want to read to you a letter that we received...that I received in January. He's an honorably discharged Vietnam veteran and a registered voter. And he says, I'm contacting you today to encourage your support of LB 53. Over the years, as a professional, I have managed reentry programs for felons, counseled felons in mental health substance abuse programs, provided outreach support services to felons who have been sentenced for felony crimes and have successfully completed the terms of their sentencing, and as a community advocate, have provided support to the same population and have found them to be desirous of being productive citizens with full rights of participation in their communities. However, more often than not, they are stigmatized by their past crime. And although they have paid their penalty to society for their crime, they continue to be persecuted and suffer from the consequences of their past transgressions. If we as a democracy believe in the democratic process, which many our prosecuted citizens fought for, then we need to reaffirm that with them and the rest of the world by allowing them the right to participate in our democracy after they have paid their debt to society. I am encouraged by this bill, and I support it, because I am aware of the 44,000 people in our state who are disenfranchised and discouraged by the 10-year period they must wait until they are able to apply for a pardon to receive full citizenship. By restoring voting rights immediately to ex-felons who are working and paying taxes in our society, the Legislature would be encouraging these people to become integrated into our society, and give them an opportunity to reinvest in their great responsibility to upholding the democratic process that we hold so dear. And then he goes on and thanks us for his time and so forth. This isn't the only letter that I've received in this vein. There was a letter to the editor in one of the major newspapers the other day...

SENATOR CUDABACK: One minute.

SENATOR SCHIMEK: ...that was from somebody who had been on active duty. And he felt that he had fought for the right to people...for people to vote. And he felt that if our troops