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Webb vows to continue fighting for criminal justice reform

By Sharon C. Fitzgerald

Virginia's retiring U.S. senator said Friday that he will continue to fight for change in the national criminal justice system in his remaining time in office.

Just hours after his sponsored National Criminal Justice Commission Act was filibustered on the Senate floor, Sen. Jim Webb, a Democrat, spoke to a packed room of students, staff and guests at the University of Virginia's Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy.

The act would have created a bipartisan committee to conduct a \$14 million, 18-month review of the nation's criminal justice system and offer recommendations to overhaul it.

"We listened, we listened and we adapted our legislation," Webb told the audience Friday. "We were filibustered by the Republicans on a program that should be a no-brainer, a total no-brainer. We asked them to bring their ideas to the table, and their arguments were ridiculous. We did not succeed in creating this commission, but we will. It shows what has happened since the 2010 election."

Webb, who is not seeking re-election in 2012, talked about the importance of leaders who work together to solve problems and continue working on those problems despite defeat.

"Leadership makes a difference," Webb said. "Going into an area and calling out the places in our society that need improvement and sticking with it can have an impact."

Webb was the keynote speaker in a two-day celebration and dedication of U.Va.'s Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy.

The newest U.Va. school moved into Garrett Hall, which was recently renovated at a cost of \$12.2 million, in August.

Before his speech, Webb told the media that he was still perplexed about the government's lack of relief aid to Louisa County, where more than 1,000 homes and businesses were damaged in a strong earthquake and aftershocks in August.

This month, officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency said the damage in Louisa was not sufficient to warrant federal disaster relief.

"We were kind of surprised they did not award the funds as it's a highly unusual situation to actually have an earthquake of any size here in Virginia," Webb said. "There are a lot of people in this area where the earthquake hit that do not have the type of insurance that can cover something like this because it was unheard of and there was a lot of damage. We believe it's appropriate to have FEMA reconsider their decision."

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