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DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

**“H.R. 514 Human Trafficking Prioritization Act
for Child Sex Trafficking”**

U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04)

Author of HR 514

*Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and International Organizations*

House Floor Statement

January 26, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am proud to say that the United States continues to lead the world in our trafficking responses at home and abroad, charting the course of best practices for other countries to follow.

One of the most successful ways the U.S. transmits our best practices and ensures accountability for the minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking is the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in the U.S. Department of State.

Over the last 15 years, this office has been led by talented and dedicated Ambassadors who have produced the annual Trafficking in Persons Reports—laying bare the record of almost every country for the world to see, and summarizing the country’s progress in an annual tier ranking.

Tier 1 countries fully meet the minimum standards. Tier 2 countries do not meet the minimum standards but are making significant effort to do so. Tier 2 Watch List country are in a grace period and in real danger of becoming Tier 3 without real action, not just promises of action.

Tier 3 countries do not meet the standards and are not making significant effort to do so. Along with the embarrassment of being listed on Tier 3, Tier 3 countries are open to sanction by the U.S. government.

Since the TIP Report’s inception, more than 120 countries have enacted anti-trafficking laws and many countries have taken other steps required to significantly raise their tier rankings—citing the TIP Report as a key factor in their new anti-trafficking efforts.

We have found a system that works—but, tragically, it is sometimes muffled, misguided, and marginalized by unrelated bilateral concerns and by the internal structure of the State Department itself.

In the words of Ambassador Mark Lagon, the 2007–2009 Ambassador at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons,

‘[T]he State Department does a tremendous job in producing a report which tells it like it is, offering objective rankings. Yet at times it pulls punches, typically due to the urging of regional specialists rather than the TIP Office's dedicated experts on trafficking.’

My bill the Human Trafficking Prioritization Act, H.R. 514, will remedy this problem by keeping the fight against human trafficking from being lost in the politics of other U.S. interests. H.R. 514 will raise the status of the J/TIP “office” to that of a “bureau”—ensuring that the leadership of J/TIP is present and has an equal voice at meetings with the other bureaus and the Secretary of State.

In the words of Amb. John Miller, the 2002–2006 Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons,

‘Upgrading the status of the Office to a Bureau will not create additional bureaucracy—it will simply give J/TIP and the Ambassador-at-large who heads it equal standing with regional and functional bureaus at the State Department. That standing is absolutely essential for the issue to remain a priority, especially when multiple U.S. interests are engaged.’

We do not need the J/TIP office to be larger, but for the excellent work of the office to be heard at a higher level. My bill does that.

In addition, H.R. 514 stops countries and other State Department bureaus from gaming the tier ranking system—by limiting the time problem countries can use promises of action to avoid tier downgrade. Currently, a country can sit on the Tier 2 Watch List for up to four years with presidential waivers, effectively stringing the U.S. along with promises to take action, but never actually taking action. After 4 years, by law, the country must be automatically downgraded to Tier 3.

The law worked very well upon its first implementation in the 2013 reporting cycle. But we discovered a problem in 2014 when China was (prematurely) upgraded from Tier 3 to the Tier 2 Watch List. As the law is currently written, China can again game the system with promises and no action for four years.

The Human Trafficking Prioritization Act will hold countries like China accountable by limiting to one year the amount of time a country can stay on the Tier 2 Watch List after the country was previously auto-downgraded to Tier 3.

The Human Trafficking Prioritization Act builds on the successes of J/TIP and the tier-ranking system for the sake of the 21 million people still living in modern day slavery—and does so without increasing the cost of government.

The Human Trafficking Prioritization Act will give J/TIP the integration and voice it deserves within the State Department—and ensure accurate accountability for countries failing to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. I respectfully urge my colleagues to support this bill.