

Human Trafficking Symposium

Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith (R-Manchester)

Freehold, NJ May 8, 2023

It is an honor and privilege to join Sherriff Shaun Golden, County Prosecutor Raymond Santiago and three amazing leaders in the fight against human trafficking at today's symposium.

Survivors are the real experts—special thanks to survivor and leader Gina Cavallo for inspiring and motivating our joint efforts to be more effective in combatting these heinous crimes.

Through a survivor-informed approach, we are building effective victim-centered and trauma-informed anti-trafficking strategies at the municipal, county, state, federal and international level.

On Friday, I am chairing my 41st congressional hearing on human trafficking and will hear from three survivors as well as Trafficking In Persons Ambassador-at-Large Cindy Dyer—the point person for the Biden Administration on combatting human trafficking. Among other questions, I will ask her about trafficking on our southern border—how many women and children are exploited and what is being done to stop it and rescue the victims.

More than twenty years ago, the U.S. Congress approved and the President signed historic legislation that I authored—the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](#)—a comprehensive whole-of-government initiative to combat sex and labor trafficking in the United States and around the world.

The TVPA created a new, well-funded whole-of-government domestic and international strategy and established numerous new programs to **Protect victims**, **Prosecute traffickers** and to the extent possible, **Prevent human trafficking** in the first place—the **three Ps**.

Though it is hard to believe now, my legislation was met with a wall of skepticism and opposition—dismissed by many as a solution in search of a problem. For most people at that time—including lawmakers—the term trafficking applied almost exclusively to drugs and weapons, not human beings.

Reports of vulnerable persons—especially women and children—being reduced to commodities for sale were often met with surprise, incredulity, or indifference.

Top officials in the Clinton Administration testified against major provisions of my bill at congressional hearings I chaired and said, for example, that naming and sanctioning countries with egregiously poor records on human trafficking—including and especially government complicity—would be counterproductive.

We overcame the naysayers.

We persisted.

As a matter of fact, when my bill was stalled and languishing and presumed dead, I invited two victims of sex trafficking that my wife Marie and I had met in 1999 in St. Petersburg, Russia to tell their stories. Their testimony was pivotal.

They were incredibly courageous and candid—describing the daily abuse and horror they endured.

Nevertheless, it took over two years to muster the votes for passage and my bill was finally signed into law on [October 28, 2000](#).

Within a year after enactment no-one was arguing anymore that the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's integrated three P's strategy—prevention, protection for victims and prosecution of the traffickers—was flawed, unworkable, unnecessary, or counterproductive.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act included a number of “sea change” criminal code reforms including treating as a victim of trafficking—and not a perpetrator of a crime—anyone recruited, harbored, transported, or obtained for the purpose of a commercial sex act or for labor services who had not attained the age of 18 or through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

As the years have passed, we had to update the TVPA, taking into account lessons learned. Over the years, I've authored four additional laws to combat human trafficking—including in [2003](#), [2005](#), [2016](#)—International Megan's Law, and [2019](#) the Frederick Douglass Tracking Victims Prevention and Protection Act.

And without diminishing in any way the focus on the cruelty of sex trafficking—expanded attention has been paid to labor trafficking and its presence in our supply chains, particularly with an eye to the current forced labor camps and genocide of Uyghur Muslims and others in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The 2003 reauthorization, in particular, included a provision that is increasingly relevant to current supply chain issues.

The provision directed the President to “ensure that any federal grant, contract, or cooperative agreement shall include a condition that authorizes the Federal

department or agency involved to terminate the grant, contract, or agreement, without any penalty, if the grantee or any subgrantee of the contractor is involved with human trafficking.”

On April 18th, I chaired a [hearing on implementing the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act](#).

As you know, cobalt is a major element in the batteries of electric cars (EVs). Within weeks, I will introduce legislation to sanction individual and entities that use forced labor to mine and process cobalt.

In [July 2022, I chaired a hearing](#) on the Chinese Communist Party’s brutal exploitation of both children—about 40,000 kids—and adults to extract cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

On March 27th, the House passed legislation I authored entitled the [Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act](#) that targets the worldwide barbaric practice of murdering victims to steal their vital organs.

The Chinese Communist Party is committing this abuse like no other.

Each year, fifty thousand young victims, perhaps more—average age 28— are slaughtered by the Chinese Communist Party for their organs. [Ethnic groups targeted for mass harvesting](#) include Uyghurs—who suffer from Xi Jinping’s ongoing genocide—and the Falun Gong, whose peaceful meditation and exercise practices—and exceptional good health—make their organs highly desirable. The Chinese Communist Party has declared them to be an ‘evil cult’—fit for butchering.

[Under my bill](#), anyone complicit with these crimes would face both civil and criminal penalties including up to 20 years in prison.

In the next couple of days, I hope to introduce the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act.

[My bill—same name with some new features—passed the House in July but not the Senate](#)—was informed by survivor input—strengthens and expands U.S. anti-trafficking programs.

The new Frederick Douglass Act ramps up prevention and protection efforts against trafficking of children and expands situational awareness training for elementary and secondary school students that I first included in my 2019 law.

It adds government accountability through anti-trafficking training and policies through our travel partnerships with hotels. It also includes a Survivor Empowerment approach with wrap-around social services, case management, mental health care, life skills training, and employment and education assistance.

The bill enhances successful programs like the grants for preventing child trafficking by adding prevention of online grooming and trafficking of children through sustainable, age-appropriate, trauma-informed approaches and scalable programs that use proven and tested best practices.