



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 159

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2013

No. 29

House of Representatives

Support VAWA; Protect Human Trafficking Victims

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey:

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Violence Against Women Act, VAWA, authored by Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

It authorizes \$2.2 billion for VAWA to help victimized women and children seeking assistance to break the cycle of violence and live a life free from intimidation, fear, abuse and exploitation.

VAWA is landmark legislation with a proven track record of assisting abused and battered women and must be reauthorized. VAWA includes: \$222 million in STOP grants, providing critical funding to improve the criminal justice system's response to crimes against women; \$73 million in Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforce Protection Orders, providing resources to bring abusers to justice and providing victims with the legal protections to live free of fear from their abusers; \$57 million for Legal Assistance for Victims, providing necessary funding to strengthen state legal systems and ensure that agencies charged with handling domestic abuse and sexual assault cases are able to assist victims through the legal process; and millions more

in housing assistance to shelter victims away from their abusers; grants to protect young women on college campuses; training and services for abuse against women in rural areas and those with disabilities; funding to reduce rape kit backlogs so we can identify past abusers and provide justice to their victims; and many more critical programs that strengthen communities to combat abuse against vulnerable populations.

I just want to point out something that far too little attention has been paid to: the Leahy Amendment cuts to the State Department Trafficking in Persons, TIP, Office contained in the Senate version.

A little over a decade ago, I authored the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, TVPA, of 2000—the landmark law that created America's comprehensive policy to combat modern day slavery.

The TVPA created the State Department's Trafficking in Persons Office, now led by an ambassador-at-large with a robust complement of over 50 dedicated and highly trained people.

The Leahy trafficking amendment to S. 47—Title XII—guts the TIP office and represents a significant retreat in the struggle to end human trafficking. The only way to fix it is to pass the Violence Against Women Act sponsored by Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers, go to negotiations, and strike the cut.

Madam Speaker the now at risk Trafficking in Persons Office is an extraordinary advocacy mechanism and has had a huge impact worldwide. In addition to “best practices” advocacy, the office monitors labor and sex trafficking in every country of the world pursuant to minimum standards prescribed in the TVPA and makes recommendations for whether or not countries should be ranked Tier I, Tier II Watch List or Tier III. Countries with bad records and who fail to make “serious and sustained” efforts to improve are designated Tier 3—the worst ranking—which may result in sanctions.

For over a decade the Trafficking in Persons Office has been the flagship in our struggle to combat human trafficking, but that will change if the McMorris Rodgers VAWA fails and the House has no means to fix the Leahy amendment in conference.

The Leahy Amendment, cuts the authorization for the TIP office authorization from \$7 million down to \$2 million—effectively eviscerating the TIP office.

Making matters worse the Leahy Amendment also shifts responsibilities to the regional bureaus—and we have had problems with regional bureaus and trafficking over the last decade—as my colleagues I’m sure know. Regional bureaus have a large portfolio of issues that they handle. As they deal with those other issues, trafficking is often relegated to page four or page five of their agenda and talking points. The TIP office on the other hand walks point, is singular in focus, and it is imperative that it be adequately resourced and vested with current-day powers to act. Under Leahy the TIP office is demoted significantly.

The simple fact of the matter is that since enactment of the TVPA in 2000, the regional bureaus have often sought to undermine and weaken TIP country ranking recommendations due to other so-called equities. Advancing human rights is general and combating human trafficking in particular, far too often takes a back seat to other priorities.

That’s why, back in 2000, I led the effort and wrote the law to make the Trafficking in Persons Office the lead in gathering, analyzing, and putting forward recommendations for every country.

That’s why slashing the Trafficking in Persons Office is an awful idea. The victims deserve better.