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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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“H.R. 515 International Megan’s Law to Prevent Demand For Child Sex Trafficking”

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*House Floor Statement
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Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an historic week in the House of Representatives as we seek to pass 12 bills to fight human trafficking. As the prime author of the landmark Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000—as well as reauthorizations of that law in 2003 and 2005—I believe the bills under consideration by the House today will further prevent the horrific crimes of human trafficking, protect and assist victims—and aid the prosecution those who exploit and abuse.

I would like to offer my profound appreciation to the Majority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, for ensuring that all the hard work of this House in the 113th Session is not lost or even delayed, but rather immediately sent back to the Senate for action. Leader McCarthy has explored numerous ways to prevent, prosecute traffickers and protect victims. His deep personal commitment to ending modern day slavery has—and will continue—to make a major difference.

Mr. Speaker, protecting children from violence and predatory behavior are among the highest duties and responsibilities of government.

The International Megan’s Law to Prevent Demand for Child Sex Trafficking, H.R. 515, will protect children from child sex tourism by notifying destination countries when convicted pedophiles plan to travel. And to protect American children, the bill encourages the President to use bilateral agreements and assistance to establish reciprocal notification—so that we will know when convicted child-sex offenders are coming here.

I actually got the idea of International Megan’s Law in a conversation with a Trafficking in Person’s delegation from Thailand during a meeting in my office in 2007. I asked what Thai officials would do if we were to notify them of travel by a convicted pedophile. Each of the dozen officials said they would bar entry into their nation of such a predator.

Today will mark the third time in 8 years that this bill has passed the House with strong support from both sides of the aisle—the second in its present, streamlined form. The only change in this version is an additional clause in 8(c) underscoring the fine investigatory work of the Department of Homeland Security in the area of child exploitation and Congress’s support for its continuance in Angel Watch as well as in the investigations of the Cyber Crimes Center (C3).

This provision is not intended to supersede notification requirements elsewhere in the bill.

I am encouraged that the Senate has signaled its support and willingness to improve common-sense US procedures preventing the sex trafficking of children by high-risk predators. And I look forward to working with the Senate.

Child predators thrive on secrecy, a secrecy that allows them to commit heinous crimes against children. In 1994, a young girl in my town and district was lured into the home of a convicted pedophile who lived across the street from her. Megan Kanka, seven, was raped and murdered.

No one, including Megan Kanka's parents, knew that their neighbor had been convicted of child sexual assault. The outrage over this tragedy led to enactment of Megan's Laws—public sex offender registries—in every state in the country.

It is imperative that we take the lessons we have learned on how to protect our children from known child sex predators within our borders and expand those protections globally.

The International Labor Organization has estimated that 1.8 million children are victims of commercial sexual exploitation around the world each year.

A deeply-disturbing 2010 report by the Government Accountability Office entitled "Current Situation Results in Thousands of Passports Issued to Registered Sex Offenders" found that at least 4,500 U.S. passports were issued to registered sex offenders in fiscal year 2008 alone.

Meanwhile, the law enforcement and media reports continue to document Americans on the U.S. sex offender registries who were caught sexually abusing children in East Asia, Central and South America.

It's the same horror movie replayed over and over.

The Department of Homeland Security's Angel Watch program has been doing outstanding work in alerting countries about potential danger from American sex offenders. My bill, H.R. 515, would codify and streamline this excellent program, ensuring that actionable information about child-sex offender travel gets to destination countries in time for those countries to assess the potential dangers—and respond appropriately, whether that is to allow entry, deny entry or visa, monitor travel, limit travel, etc.

Once notified, nations are empowered to take protective actions.

International Megan's Law also directs the President to include guidance in diplomacy, training, and technical assistance abroad on how other countries can create their own public or private sex offender registries similar to what we have in the United States—and how they can use these registries to alert the United States when a child-sex offender is intending to travel here.

The goal is reciprocal notice to protect children at home and abroad from known sex offenders.

I personally have spoken to foreign officials and non-governmental representatives who have asked me when the United States Congress is going to do something about American sex offenders who are traveling to their countries to rape their children. H.R. 515, International Megan's Law to Prevent Demand for Child Sex Trafficking, is a serious response to that question.

I would like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the House for their hard work and collaboration in the creation of this bill, and I look forward to its swift passage in the Senate.