

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
October 6, 2011

This week, the Committee hosted Justices of the Supreme Court for a conversation on the role of judges under our Constitution. With its actions on Monday, the Senate confirmed a handful of judicial nominees on which this Committee had completed its review last May and early June, and the Arizona nominee whose path should serve as the model for more effective and timely confirmations. Still, Federal judicial vacancies across the country remain above 90. This is the longest extended period of high vacancies in the last 35 years. More than one of every 10 Federal judgeships remains vacant. Today the Committee has the opportunity to make progress and vote on 10 of President Obama's judicial nominees to fill vacancies in California, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York, Washington, West Virginia and Utah, as well as on the 11th Circuit and the Federal Circuit. All these nominees participated in hearings last month.

We also have before us a bipartisan bill to provide additional judges for overburdened Federal courts in the border states of Arizona, California, Minnesota and Texas. In addition, Chairman Smith of the House Judiciary Committee has asked that we consider bills having to do with judicial venue, removal, jurisdiction and the calculation of time under Federal laws and rules. Companion bills on those issues introduced by Senator Klobuchar and House members can be adopted today without delay.

I would like to focus in my opening remarks on our bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. When we considered the Second Chance reauthorization bill and the Personal Data Privacy and Security Act, I noted that these had previously been bipartisan efforts. I was disappointed that every Republican member of this Committee voted against reauthorizing the Second Chance Act and against that cybercrime bill, despite the fact that it included a number of Republican Senators' amendments.

The original Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its reauthorizations all enjoyed widespread bipartisan support. Championed by the late Senator Wellstone and former Senator Brownback, the original bill was passed by a Congress with a Republican majority and signed into law by President Clinton. The most recent reauthorization in 2008 was passed by a Congress with a Democratic majority and signed into law by President Bush. Our current bipartisan bill has 18 cosponsors including Senators Feinstein, Schumer and Coons on this Committee, and Senators Cochran, Rubio, Burr, Heller, and Brown of Massachusetts.

There is good reason for this strong bipartisan support. Human trafficking is abhorrent. It is a modern-day form of slavery in which victims are forced into labor or sexual exploitation. Traffickers prey on the most vulnerable members of society. No country is immune. It happens even here. The United States has made great strides in the fight against human trafficking

through our landmark, bipartisan legislation, and we should act quickly to see it reauthorized.

Earlier this summer, the Justice Department secured convictions against traffickers who used fraud, violence, coercion and threats of deportation to compel undocumented immigrant women hired to be waitresses to engage in commercial sex acts. In another case, the Justice Department secured convictions against members of a multinational criminal enterprise who, out of pure greed, lured workers to the United States on false promises of legitimate employment, and then held them in terrible conditions, withheld most of their pay, and threatened to have them deported if they attempted to leave.

Thanks to the tools provided by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, we have made progress in combating this major human rights abuse and I applaud the work of the Department of Justice in bringing these cases. But there is more work to be done. The Federal Government estimates that thousands of people are trafficked to the United States annually for the purpose of labor and sexual exploitation. Globally, the total number of slavery and human trafficking victims may be as high as 27 million.

In order to combat this scourge and protect victims, the bill we consider today expands enforcement tools and encourages interagency cooperation to identify victims, investigate offenses, and provide victim services. The bill promotes accountability by ensuring that Federal funds are used for their intended purposes, and directs Federal support to the programs that have been most successful. The overall funding level has been reduced by \$11.5 million in light of the current fiscal climate.

Fighting human trafficking is a priority of the Obama administration. But that should not be a reason to oppose this legislation. This should not be about partisan politics, but is something on which we need to stand together. Nowhere on Earth should it be acceptable to deceive, abuse, and force a person into a life of enslavement, least of all here in the United States. I look forward to all members of this Committee joining with me in this fight.

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