

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
October 13, 2011

This morning the Committee should complete our action on the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. It is my hope that our bipartisan bill, which has 21 cosponsors, can be reported favorably today with strong bipartisan Committee support.

The bill was held over last week. Senator Grassley and I used the intervening week to work together on a substitute amendment. The compromise we worked out includes painful sacrifices from my point of view. It is not everything that I wanted, and I suspect that Senator Grassley did not get everything he may have wanted.

The original version of the bill had already included cuts to current authorization levels in deference to our difficult fiscal situation. The substitute contains much greater cuts, resulting in authorization levels that are one-third lower than current authorizations. The substitute also removes several provisions that I believed, and my Republican and Democratic cosponsors believed, would be instrumental in combating trafficking. We regret that these provisions had to be removed because Republican members of this Committee objected.

The substitute contains more extensive restrictions and requirements. While I disagree with the criticisms leveled at the Trafficking Victims Protection Act by some, Senator Grassley and I took great care to ensure that the concerns of Senator Coburn and others were addressed.

Despite these difficult cuts, what I was able to maintain in the substitute are core provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, as well as key provisions to strengthen and improve this law.

The original Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its reauthorizations all enjoyed widespread bipartisan support. 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.

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 year, 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.

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 is in the millions. In order to combat this outrageous conduct and protect victims, the substitute we consider today expands enforcement tools and encourages interagency cooperation to identify victims, investigate offenses, and provide victim services. 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 appreciate Senator Grassley working with me to make progress on this legislation, and I hope all members of this Committee will join with us in this fight by voting to report the substitute to the Senate and agreeing to prompt Senate passage.

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