



WOLF OPENING STATEMENT AT TRAFFICKING HEARING

Washington, D.C. (February 26, 2014) – Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), chairman of the House Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) Appropriations subcommittee, made the following opening statement at a CJS hearing today on sex trafficking:

“A few years ago, a local church group sought my assistance to help end human trafficking in Thailand and Albania. I was happy to lend my support, but pointed out that sex trafficking wasn’t just occurring in faraway places. It was happening just across the river in northern Virginia and across the U.S.

“We can – and we must – confront this injustice. I have long admired the abolitionist efforts of William Wilberforce. Many have called human trafficking the slavery issue of our day. Ending this insidious criminal will require the same doggedness that Wilberforce exhibited.

“This committee has been very active on this issue for a number of years. Most recently, the CJS portion of the 2014 omnibus spending bill signed into laws last month includes a number of provisions to help combat trafficking.

“The bill directs the FBI to increase the amount of resources dedicated to human trafficking, improve coordination with other law enforcement agencies to better address trafficking and regularly report to Congress on what it is doing to fight trafficking.

“The Attorney General is required to submit a comprehensive report on all DOJ anti- trafficking activities, including legislative proposals to bolster anti-trafficking enforcement.

“The Justice Department is required to detail action it has taken to investigate allegations of human trafficking or abuse of nonimmigrant visa holders to enforce a policy of zero tolerance for sex and labor trafficking by federal contractors.

“The U.S. Attorneys are expected to maintain their human trafficking task forces and continue to undertake proactive investigations, including investigations of persons or entities facilitating trafficking in persons through the use of classified advertising on the Internet.

“Finally, the Justice Department must continue its outreach in the form of public notices with regard to the prevalence of human trafficking activities and report to the subcommittee on its efforts

“The bill also provides nearly \$14.25 million for grants to help victims of trafficking and \$67 million for missing and exploited children programs.

“It also should be noted that in addition to the language on trafficking, the bill provides \$417 million for the Office of Violence Against Women, which is higher than both the FY 2013 level and the president’s 2014 budget request.

“Today, we will hear from four witnesses to learn about the state of efforts to halt and prevent

the trafficking of human beings and to ask what more can this can this Congress do?

“Just last week, a jury convicted an Indiana man for human trafficking. The man forced four women – including a 16-year-old girl – into prostitution. As DOJ noted in its press release announcing the conviction, ‘they did this, in part, by posting photographs of the females on backpage.com.’

“Unfortunately, this is an all too common pattern.

“Last March, an Atlanta man pleaded guilty in federal court in Alexandria to ‘running a commercial sex business that prostituted multiple juvenile girls in Herndon, Virginia, and other locations throughout Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.’

“The FBI press release announcing the guilty plea specifically mentioned the website: ‘Daily, the enterprise posted multiple advertisements on Backpage.com, and sometimes within minutes customers would call.’

“And now we see Backpage.com being used in places like Winchester, Virginia, which is a city in the western part of my District. There have been two instances in recent weeks where arrests have been made in relation to ads on Backpage.com.

“During the Super Bowl, the FBI conducted an operation targeting child sex trafficking, which resulted in the rescue of 16 children and the arrest of 45 pimps and their associates. According to the Newark *Star-Ledger*, some of these arrests were made by FBI agents posing as “Johns” and responding to ads on sites like Backpage.com

“At the recent NBA All-Star weekend in New Orleans, 30 people were arrested in connection with sex trafficking. According to law enforcement officials, women were brought in from across the country: California; Florida; Illinois; Missouri; Ohio; Tennessee and Texas to engage in sex-related crimes during the weekend.

“On this topic, I especially want to thank Cindy McCain, who will be testifying today, for helping to raise awareness of the problem of sex trafficking at the Super Bowl and other large sporting events. You may have seen her recent op-ed in the *Washington Post* on this subject.

“The subcommittee has jurisdiction over funding for the Department of Justice, and I want to thank the FBI agents, Director Comey and former Director Mueller, as well as the U.S. Attorneys for their work to bring these traffickers to justice. At the same time, I am concerned about actions the department has NOT taken.

“The subcommittee directed the department to report on the effectiveness of existing laws and authorities to go after websites such as Backpage.com – not just the traffickers that advertise on them. The report was due on April 25, 2013. That was 10 months ago. To date, the subcommittee has yet to see it.

“I have personally written the Attorney General several times over the last two year urging the department to prosecute Backpage.com and similar sites. I am submitting copies of all the letters today for the hearing record.

“In these letters I repeatedly wrote that if the department was of the view that current law would not support such action, then provide a legal analysis and possible legislative language for how this could be remedied.

“Many of my letters went unanswered, and the responses I did receive, failed to address my primary concern with respect to Backpage.com. I have even urged, without effect, Attorney General Holder to publicly call out Backpage.com and similar sites to at least add an element of shame in the public square. The Attorney General is failing.

“There is much more that can be done to tackle this problem, and I am confident that today’s witnesses will shine even more light on the matter.

“First we will hear from Stephanie Vu, a human trafficking survivor and advocate. Stephanie frequently works in conjunction with two non- profit organizations: Shared Hope International and Youth for Tomorrow, which is the northern Virginia charity founded by Joe Gibbs. These two non-profits are involved in stopping human trafficking and aiding survivors.

“After her will be Detective Bill Woolf of the Fairfax County Police Department, who is on the front lines of dealing with this problem. He and his colleagues in northern Virginia are making a difference. I know several of Detective Woolf’s fellow officers are here today and I want acknowledge them. As the son of a police officer, I know what you do every day. Thank you.

“Det. Woolf was featured in the article from *Washingtonian Magazine* staff circulated last week. In case you missed it, here let me read you the title and how it opens: *“You’re Pretty – You Could Make Some Money. In the affluent Northern Virginia suburbs, a shocking problem has taken root: Police and federal agents have taken down dozens of juvenile sex traffickers in the last two years alone. Here’s how one gang recruited teenagers through Facebook, at Metro Stations and shopping malls – even in the halls of Fairfax County Public Schools.”*

“After hearing from them, we will begin our second panel, where we will hear from Cindy McCain, who is a national leader in anti-trafficking efforts and is co-chairperson of the Arizona Governor’s Task Force on Human Trafficking.

“We will also hear from John Ryan, who is the President and CEO of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.”