

## REMARKS TO JOHNS HOPKINS HUMAN TRAFFICKING SYMPOSIUM

Wednesday, May 1, 2013

*Good morning and thank you for having me here today.*

*I'd like to begin by thanking Dean Klag and Hopkins University for having me here to discuss a very important subject that affects all of us.*

*I am a nurse and before I came to Washington, I worked with my husband in our general surgery practice in Dunn, North Carolina. Now that I am in Washington, I am taking those lessons and skills and using them to help repair the health of our nation - which we've all seen is no small task.*

*Trafficking is a crisis that embodies the worst of human behavior. From the shadows of society, predators seek out the vulnerable and manipulate the weaknesses in our laws to exploit people for their own prerogatives.*

*Trafficking has been around for thousands of years, as it continues to adapt to new ways of exploitation. As a nation founded on the ideals of protecting our citizens from harm, it is our duty to do everything in our power to enforce the laws that we have and continue to perfect them as things continue to evolve. But focusing on these laws is only one part of the overall picture. We must also concentrate on how our public health is working on this issue and how the survivors are treated so that they can regain their lives.*

*That is why this symposium is so important. We do not have all the answers, but we do know the problems and that they must be addressed. Doctors and nurses, patients and victims, Democrats and Republicans - we are all here because each of us has been impacted by the violence and abuse happening all around us. We are here to say "enough is enough."*

*The focus of today's symposium will be on the facts and how victims are cared for. As a nurse, I have seen the best of human nature come out of the most terrifying ordeals. We are often helpless to stop abuse from happening, but we can ensure that the victims are cared for and protected from future attacks.*

*That is why this symposium is focused on the public health impacts of human trafficking. As we all know, many violent offenders were once abused themselves. Without proper care and counseling, there is the very real risk of these victims continuing the cycle and harming others in the future. This vicious cycle must end and it is up to all of us to find a solution.*

*In order to find meaningful remedies to this problem, both research and evidence-based patterns can be useful tools. But the findings from such research need to be applied to what is actually happening. For instance, I am concerned about something that was included in the recent reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act.*

*The new law has been updated to decriminalize underage prostitution. That sounds benign on its face, but there are those who believe that this will actually make the problem worse instead of*

*better. They reason that abusers will now target under-aged girls and force them into prostitution. They have this new incentive because they cannot be arrested once their age is verified, meaning they can't be forced into counseling and oversight. They simply walk....and continue this vicious cycle.*

*That is why research and analysis is so crucial to addressing human trafficking. We need to know if our well-meaning efforts are actually going to help or hinder before creating new policies that change our approach to inhibiting violence.*

*I support research, education, and the development of best practices in this area, but with regard to research, the fact is we are in a critical fiscal crisis. Dollars available for research are difficult to come by and because of that, we are going to have to prioritize and learn to do more with less. My staff and I have been on the website of the National Institute of Health, where it lists every research project they have funded. I can assure you that there is waste and abuse in the system and it must be addressed.*

*By cutting frivolous research to fund transformational research, we will be able to address our priorities. Collaboration between US agencies, the private sector, and the international community is also critical and I am delighted to see that it is one of the core principles you will be examining at this symposium. I am encouraged by this meeting today and urge you to continue to reach out, spread the message, and continue to think outside the box.*

*As you will see throughout this symposium, we are all coming together and having an important discussion. Human trafficking is a problem that transcends political barriers; state to state, town to town, and international stakeholders must be involved in developing solutions.*

*Our country has been polarized by so many issues, but nothing will get accomplished if we don't come together and present ideas. Protecting victims of abuse is and will remain a bipartisan issue and I stand here with you all to get the conversation started.*

*Thank you again for having me here today and I look forward to hearing from the experts on the challenges and ideas regarding this important issue.*