

I have been focused like a laser for some time now on justice for the victims of human trafficking. When I think for a minute about the fact that the typical victim of human trafficking is a 12- to 13-year-old girl, who has been sold essentially into sex slavery and who has lost control over her life and perhaps, to her mind, to her future. I cannot think of a more compelling need for the Senate than to try to offer a lifeline to these victims of human trafficking. That is what this legislation that hopefully we will act on today—perhaps no later than tomorrow—is designed to do. It creates a fund that could be as high as \$30 million—not from taxes but from fines and penalties paid by people who commit sexual offenses and basically represents the demand side of the human trafficking equation.

We have found a way now, on a bipartisan basis, to move this legislation forward so we can offer a hand to rescue these victims of human trafficking, so we can give them an opportunity to heal and we can provide them some hope for a better future.

I know all of us, by virtue of the privilege of the office that we serve in, have had stories from constituents about human trafficking. I remember quite clearly Brooke Axtell of Austin, TX, who now works with a number of nonprofits, and has basically turned her tragic story into serving others who have likewise become victims of human trafficking. Brooke's story is really almost beyond belief. She says that at age 7 she was sexually abused. She was literally held captive in a basement and sold to men who would pay money to have sex with her, a 7-year old child.

Brooke has brought to light her pain and has begun to heal as a result of having been rescued and been given a helping hand. But she has now turned her tragic story into hope by honorably helping others find a way out of a life that she herself experienced. She founded a group called Survivor Healing and Empowerment, which is a healing community of survivors of rape, abuse, and sex trafficking.

There is another horrific story that I have heard—I am sure just as all the Members of the Senate have heard coming from their States, because this is not something isolated in one State. This is a national—indeed, it is an international—phenomenon. Another woman I have had the privilege of meeting with and who has shared her story with me is Melissa Woodward from the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Melissa was 12 years old when she was sold into the sex trade by a family member—unbelievable. Eventually, she was pulled out of school to be trafficked full time when she was in the sixth grade. Her life, as she describes it, became a prison. She was literally chained to a bed in a warehouse, she says, and endured regular beatings and obviously, sexual assaults.

There was even once an attempt to set her on fire by one of her abusers.

All the while, she says, she was forced to serve between 5 and 30 men every day. She said she wished she was dead.

As heartbreaking as Melissa's story is, just as sad is the way she was treated after she escaped her captors. In one of the big changes in the way we have approached victims of human trafficking—at one point we claimed they were the criminal because they had engaged in prostitution. But the idea of a child prostitute is an oxymoron. A child cannot consent to a life of prostitution.

What we find, in looking at the victims of human trafficking, is that many of them are manipulated, coerced, and forced to engage in this sex activity for the economic benefit of their johns or their pimps or their traffickers. This is all about money. This is about the face of evil that treats human beings as objects or as things, without the basic dignity and respect which all human beings are entitled to. But as I said, one of the problems with the way we used to treat victims of human trafficking is that we treated them like criminals. That was all too common an outcome for trafficking victims who were labeled as prostitutes and left with very few options but to ultimately return to a nightmare that, sadly, exists in our country.

That is beginning to change. It needs to change even more, which is another reason why we need to pass this bill. This is the kind of legislation that I think in many ways is unique, because it is a nonpartisan piece of legislation. All this legislation is designed to do is to help the victims of human trafficking get rescued and then begin to heal and to get on with their lives. It is designed to provide much-needed resources for victims of human trafficking—plain and simple. It may be nothing more than a safe place to sleep, protected from the people who would continue to abuse them.

It is designed to help people such as Brooke, Melissa, and so many others—the tens of thousands of victims of human trafficking. This legislation would not only provide help for those victims, but it would ensure that children such as Melissa are treated as victims and not criminals.

It would also add law enforcement tools to help authorities rescue victims and to take down human traffickers and the organized criminal networks who support them. That is an important point because human trafficking is not a mom-and-pop business. This is run by organized crime and criminal networks, some of them international or transnational.

I want to thank my colleagues for caring—for caring about people such as Melissa and Brooke and the many examples of human trafficking that we have all been introduced to.

I want to particularly express my gratitude for all of our colleagues for working on this and not giving up until we found a pathway toward success. This body's consideration of this bill

has proven that compromise and bipartisanship need not be relics of the past in today's Washington. They are very much alive and well, particularly when the need is so very great, as it is in this area. So now for the sake of these victims, let's get this important legislation passed and provide crucial help for the children trapped in modern day slavery.

I want to just conclude by saying a few thank-you's. I know it is a little premature. But we would not have gotten this far if it were not for the help of organizations such as Rights4Girls, Shared Hope International, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, the End Child Prostitution and Trafficking organization, the National Association to Protect Children, and members of our staff in the Senate who have worked so hard to get us where we are today.

I want to express my gratitude to Senator KLOBUCHAR, Senator MURRAY, and Senator REID, on the other side of the aisle, who have worked so closely with us, and of course to the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator GRASSLEY, and particularly I want to single out the majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL. He said we would not move to the nomination for Attorney General of the United States until we get this done. And, indeed, today, I hope and believe that we will get this done, and then we can turn to that nomination.

But there are others, perhaps too many to name: Senator WARNER, Senator HEITKAMP, and others on the Democratic side. There are those on the Republican side. Senator COLLINS comes to mind, and there are others who have worked so hard and so relentlessly and with such determination to get us where we are today. We need to get this over the finish line so we can move on to other business.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FLAKE). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:30 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING ACT OF 2015—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I was not going to be talking right now, but I understand some of the people who are going to be reserving time are not yet here.