

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the Allow States and Victims To Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017

April 11, 2018

The President. Thank you very much for being with us today as we sign this crucial legislation to combat online sex trafficking and bring criminals to justice. And the people behind me have been working on this long and hard. That's political, as well as some of our great citizens. And we appreciate it.

I want to thank House Majority Leader McCarthy. Kevin, thank you very much. Senator Portman. Senator Portman? Thank you very much, Senator. I know you two have really been working along with Congresswoman Wagner, Congresswoman Walters—thank you very much; great job—and all of the Members from both parties who worked tirelessly to pass the Fight of the Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017. So we have an official name: Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act.

Representative Ann L. Wagner. FOSTA.

The President. Sounds good, right?

Rep. Wagner. FOSTA. [*Laughter*] Yes.

The President. And you, did you work hard. [*Laughter*] I also want to thank Governor Kenneth Mapp of Michigan [the U.S. Virgin Islands].^{*} And we have—and where's Kenneth? Kenneth was here.

Governor Kenneth E. Mapp of the United States Virgin Islands. Right here.

The President. Hi, Kenneth.

Gov. Mapp. How are you doing, sir?

The President. We got you all straightened out on that beautiful island, right? [*Laughter*]

Gov. Mapp. Yes, thank you so much.

The President. Governor Kenneth Mapp and Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette, who has been so great in so many ways. And good luck with your race.

Michigan State Attorney General William D. Schuette of Michigan. Thank you.

The President. And I think Dick Blumenthal is here. I saw Dick. So thank you very much for coming. I appreciate it very much.

Senator Richard Blumenthal. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. And the rest of the people are much more important because they're not politicians. Right? [*Laughter*] And, Bill—Bill Schuette, thank you very much. We appreciate it.

Most importantly, I want to thank the survivors and families who join us today. I'm signing this bill in your honor. And we are all together—politicians, both Republican and Democrat—signing this and representing this to you in your honor. So thank you all very much. We really very much appreciate it. You're very brave.

^{*} White House correction.

You've endured what no person on Earth should ever have to endure, and we are going to do everything in our power to make sure that traffickers are brought to a swift and firm justice. And I've heard statistics where trafficking in the world is more now than it ever has been ever in the history of the world. And you wouldn't believe that with, you know, modern-day everything. But they use modern-day better than law enforcement can use modern-day, whether it's the internet or anything else. And you wouldn't believe that. But trafficking is probably worse today than at any time in history.

So I want to thank you for your courage and thank you for helping survivors across our country. And you are not alone. You are not alone. And this is a very important day. If we work together, we can get the criminal traffickers off our streets and off of the internet. We can bring safety and hope to every community across the country, and we can create a culture that respects the dignity of every child of God.

So I just want to thank everybody for being here. And I think what we'll do is, I'd love to have a few of you make statements. Kevin, maybe we start with you.

House Majority Leader Kevin O. McCarthy. Well, first I want to thank you. And I want to thank all the survivors. We would not be here today if it wasn't for your courage. And the difference that this is already making—we've tried for 10 years to get this bill through. You just achieved something we haven't been able to do, because, of the hundreds of thousands of children who are trafficked, 70 percent of them are online. And because of what you're doing today, that's already shut down. Eighty-seven percent of that is already shut down.

The President. That's fantastic.

Leader McCarthy. You are saving lives.

The President. Thank you, Kevin. That's so nice. And I have to give credit to Ivanka Trump. She's here someplace. [Applause] She was fantastic. She's been a great representative, I will say.

Leader McCarthy. At the very beginning of your administration, she put a meeting together of all of us over there—the start of making this happen.

The President. That's true. Thank you, Ivanka, very much.

Rob, would you like to say something?

Senator Robert J. Portman. Mr. President, you're correct about Ivanka. [Laughter] Early on, she sent some personal tweets out which were very helpful to us, at a time when, to be frank, many people thought we couldn't get here. There were people who believed that this was not the appropriate way to go, and we instead persevered, with the help of all these survivors with us today.

They kept saying, "You know, it's unbelievable"—as you just said—"that trafficking could be increasing in this country, in this century." And yet it has been.

The President. Unbelievable.

Sen. Portman. And all the experts say it's because of the internet. So we had to deal with this issue. And there was a Federal law, unbelievably, that actually gave these websites immunity, that shielded them from prosecution or from these victims and survivors you see here being able to have their day in court. And so they persevered.

And by signing this today, Mr. President, you will make a huge difference in the lives of so many women, girls, boys going forward. And I want to thank you for that and, again, thank the survivors who are here because they're the ones who led this fight.

The President. That's true. That's so true.

Dick.

Sen. Blumenthal. I want to thank my partner, Rob Portman. It was really a partnership in the Senate, and the bipartisanship on this issue really can provide a model for the country of how we can work together and do anything if we are together.

And I just want to add my thanks to the survivors. I've been working on this issue for more than a decade. And they said it literally couldn't be done because we couldn't overcome the power and the wealth of the folks who had a vested interest in that statute that was protecting the online traffickers. But with your help, your courage, and your strength, we did it. Thank you.

Leader McCarthy. Mr. President, it was Ann and Mimi who put this bill together to make it get to your desk too.

The President. Good. Well, say something. [*Laughter*]

Representative Marian K. "Mimi" Walters. Well, first of all, thank you to all the survivors. You have a lot of courage. It's difficult to come forward, and we couldn't have done this without you.

I come from Orange County, California, and last year, there was a sex trafficking ring that was uncovered. It—as you said, didn't know it could happen in my backyard, and it is everywhere. And I became much more involved once I found out what had happened. So I am so honored to be here today. I'm so glad that we're now going to hold those accountable who are hurting people.

The President. Really great work. We appreciate it.

Rep. Wagner. H.R. 1865, Mr. President, FOSTA.

The President. That's right. [*Laughter*]

Rep. Wagner. We are so excited. And this is landmark legislation that is truly, as the leader said, going to save lives, and it already is. I received a text message from the Manhattan DA last night that said we have already shut down 87 percent—87 percent—of the online sex trafficking ads out there. And we're after the remaining 13 percent.

It's amazing what this is going to do to give prosecutors, the Department of Justice, State and local district attorneys the ability to go after and shut down these websites, put people behind bars, give victims the justice they deserve, and to actually go to the heart of the Communications Decency Act and make sure that the courts know, that the public knows, that survivors know that it was never Congress's intention, through CDA, to make a red light district out of the internet. If it's a crime offline, it's a crime online. And we are grateful to your leadership, Mr. President, and to Ivanka—

The President. Great job.

Rep. Wagner. —who has really led the charge in helping us bring this together.

The President. Great job. Great job. Thank you very much. And I didn't know you were going to be here. You have to say—you have been so fantastic. [*Laughter*] I didn't know she was going to be here. Now I'm happy.

Representative Virginia A. Foxx. Well, I just want to say, Mr. President, that we have the Center for Missing and Exploited Children in the jurisdiction of the Education and Workforce Committee, and we want to highlight that too. Just as Congresswoman Wagner has talked about what's been happening, there is a resource there of the Federal Government, and we want people to go to that and to pay attention to it and use the center when necessary.

But hopefully, of course, we'd like to see that be able to go away, because we wouldn't have exploited children.

The President. Right. That would be nice.

Rep. Foxx. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much.

Filmmaker Mary Mazzio. So, Mr. President, we have a survivor. This is M.A. She was the first person to sue Backpage in 2010, and she elbowed me and would like to say something.

Rep. Wagner. From Ferguson, Missouri.

The President. Very good. Great.

Ferguson, MO, resident M.A. I am not a survivor. I am M.A. It's about damn time. [*Laughter*]

The President. Thank you very much. Bill, say something?

Attorney General Schuette. Well, the credit goes to the survivors, Mr. President. Because of leadership in Congress, and your signature, as attorney general of Michigan, it will give me and others attorneys general and county prosecutors—

Rep. Wagner. Yes. That's right.

Attorney General Schuette. —the ability to shut down these bad actors, the Craigslist, the Backpage. And so this is a monumental day. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you very much, Bill. Thank you.

Attorney General Schuette. My pleasure. You bet.

The President. I'd love to have you say something.

Rep. Wagner. Yvonne, please. She lost her daughter, Mr. President.

The President. I know that, and I heard, and it's very special. And we'd love to have to you say a few words.

Markham, IL, resident Yvonne Ambrose. I don't want to cry in front of you, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

The President. Don't cry. It's all right. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ambrose. This is so important to all of us, and I thank you, Mr. President, so much for signing this bill into law. It means so much to our family. To lose your child who has been trafficked, which is modern-day slavery in our country, and to get that call on Christmas Eve

that your one daughter, your oldest child has been brutally murdered because she said, "no," because she did not want to be a part of this, is the worst thing.

Unfortunately, my daughter was not the first person who has this has happened to. And thanks to you and everyone here, hopefully there won't be many more after her that have to endure this pain. The pain that it has brought on my family is unimaginable.

So I thank you, Mr. President. I thank you, also, the survivors and Congressmen for everything that you guys have done.

The President. How old was your daughter?

Ms. Ambrose. She was 16.

The President. Oh, boy. We're with you 1000 percent, okay?

Ms. Ambrose. Thank you so much.

The President. Thank you very much. You're very brave to be here.

Ms. Ambrose. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. I appreciate it. Would anybody want to say anything? Anybody else? Anybody? Please.

Participant Svendgard. Mr. President, I'd just like to thank you on behalf of my family as well. My daughter was trafficked at the age of 15. And by signing this, like Yvonne said, hopefully, there won't be too many more. And I would like to thank all the Representatives and the bipartisan leadership that it took to get this across the finish line and onto your desk.

The President. Thank you. They really worked hard. Thank you. This was a tough one, but it was something that we got done. And it shouldn't have been tough.

Rep. Wagner. Right. That's right.

The President. But it's even tough politically, if you can believe that. But we got it done. Right, Kevin?

Leader McCarthy. Yes.

The President. So this is in honor of your daughter, okay? This is very important. I think we may have to give you the pen. *[Laughter]*

Ms. Ambrose. Thank you, Mr. President.

[At this point, the President signed the bill.]

Ms. Ambrose. Thank you.

The President. Well, I want to thank everybody. This is my great honor. I will say, the political people around the desk have—every one of them, Democrat and Republican—have worked very hard. And it was surprisingly difficult. You would think it would be easy, but it was much more difficult than any of us would have assumed. I guess people have reasons. But I personally don't understand those reasons. This should not have been as hard, and it shouldn't have taken as long. It's been many years in the making.

So on behalf of everybody, and just in honor of your daughter and all of the folks behind me, I want to thank you, and I want to really congratulate you. This is a great piece of legislation. It's going to make a tremendous difference.

Ms. Ambrose. Yes.

The President. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ambrose. Thank you so much, Mr. President.

The President. And we have some extra pens, right? [*Laughter*] Thank you all very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:08 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to his daughter, Assistant to the President Ivanka M. Trump. Rep. Wagner referred to Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., district attorney, New York County. H.R. 1865, approved April 11, was assigned Public Law No. 115–164.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Allow States and Victims To Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017, signing remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Ambrose, Yvonne; Blumenthal, Richard; Foxx, Virginia A.; Mapp, Kenneth E.; Mazzio, Mary; McCarthy, Kevin O.; Portman, Robert J.; Schuette, William D.; Trump, Ivanka M.; Wagner, Ann L.; Walters, Marian K. "Mimi".

Subjects: Congress : House of Representatives :: Majority leader; Law enforcement and crime : Trafficking in persons, efforts to combat; Legislation, enacted : Allow States and Victims To Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017; Virgin Islands, U.S., Governor; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Assistant to the President.

DCPD Number: DCPD201800233.