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Press Release

Biden, Hatch, and Specter Usher Violence Against Women Act Into the 21st Century with VAWA 2005

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Taking the next step in the fight to protect our nation's women and children from domestic violence, U.S. Senators Joe Biden (D-DE), Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) today introduced the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 2005. This legislation renews several successful programs and provides funding for training, education and outreach so that state and federal agencies can do a better job of preventing violence against women and assisting victims of domestic violence.

Senator Biden, author of the landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994 and VAWA 2000 called the legislation "critical to ensuring the safety and well being of our nation's women and children."

"We broke tremendous ground in 1994 and 2000. We wrote new domestic violence laws. We outlawed marital rape. We distributed over \$3.8 billion dollars to states and towns to train and support police, lawyers, judges, nurses, shelter directors and advocates to end domestic violence and sexual assault. And as a result, we've seen an almost 50% drop in domestic violence. But we must do more," said Biden, the top Democrat on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime.

"The bill we are introducing today provides a comprehensive approach to combating domestic violence. It stiffens penalties for repeat offenders, provides more money for vital services and will help battered women get the assistance and support they need," continued Biden. "It also focuses on breaking the cycle of violence through education and helping rural victims in under-served areas."

"We have made substantial progress over the past decade, but we are by no means finished," Hatch said. "In 2003, 27 Utahns died because of domestic violence, and far too many women live in constant fear and lack the means to get the help they so desperately need and deserve. This law reaffirms our commitment to helping victims of violence pick up the pieces of their lives and move forward. Its new programs may also help to prevent these tragedies from occurring in the first place."

"Violence against women knows no social, economic, or geographic bounds. Women and children are assaulted in their homes, on the streets, in the workplace, and on campuses," said Senator Specter, the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. "This legislation enhances programs that help women and children to combat the incidence of domestic violence, and I urge my colleagues to join in cosponsoring this important legislation and for its swift passage."

According to the Department of Justice, on average, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in this country every day. More than 2.5 million women are victims of violence each year and nearly one in every three women experiences at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood. Reports also indicate that up to ten million children experience domestic violence in their homes each year.

"The Violence Against Women Act helped Americans recognize battered women are survivors worthy of our support, not women who should wear long sleeves and sunglasses to work to hide their bruises," said Biden. "Now we need to go to the next level. This bill helps take us there."

"We need to address battered women's dire housing needs. It should never be a choice between getting beat up by your partner at home or becoming homeless. We need to enlist the help of employers so that a battered woman or rape victim can attend a trial or seek medical treatment without losing her job. We need to ease the immigration ties that bind battered immigrant women to their abuser.

"We need to devote more attention to the millions of children who silently witness domestic violence and teenagers caught in violent dating relationships because preventing the violence means reaching our kids,"

concluded Biden.

Biden also noted that VAWA 2005 will not only saves lives, but also save money. A 2002 university study found that money spent to reduce domestic violence saved nearly ten times the potential costs incurred between 1995 and 2000. During that time, the federal government spent \$1.6 billion for the Act's programs and avoided spending an estimated \$14.8 billion on medical, legal and other victimization costs that arise from domestic violence. On an individual level, the bill costs roughly \$15.50 per woman in the United States and saves an estimated \$159 per woman.

The bill now goes to the Judiciary Committee where it must be approved before being voted on by the full Senate.

A summary of the bill follows:

Title I on the criminal justice system will: (1) renew and increase funding to over \$400 million a year for existing grant programs for law enforcement, lawyers, judges and advocates; (2) stiffen existing criminal penalties for repeat federal domestic violence offenders; and (3) update the criminal law on stalking to incorporate new surveillance technology like Global Positioning Systems (GPS).

Title II on critical victim services will: (1) create a new, dedicated grant program for sexual assault victims that will strengthen the 1,300 rape crisis centers across the country; (2) reinvigorate programs to help older and disabled victims of domestic violence; (3) strengthen existing programs for rural victims and victims in underserved areas; and (4) increase funding to \$5 million a year for the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

Title III on youth and children includes measures to: (1) promote collaboration between domestic violence experts and child welfare agencies; and (2) enhance to \$15 million a year grants to reduce violence against women on college campuses.

Title IV aimed at prevention strategies includes programs supporting home visitations and specifically engaging men and boys in efforts to end domestic and sexual violence.

Title V strengthens the health care system's response to family violence with programs to train and educate health care professionals on domestic and sexual violence, foster family violence screening for patients, and more studies on the health ramifications of family violence.

Title VI eases the housing problems for battered women by, including (1) \$20 million grant programs to facilitate collaboration between domestic violence organizations and housing providers; (2) programs to combat family violence in public and assisted housing, including new requirements that domestic violence victims may not be evicted or cut off from voucher services because of the violence; and (3) enhancements to transitional housing resources.

Title VII helps abused women maintain secure employment by permitting battered women to take limited (up to 10 days) employment leave to address domestic violence, such as attend court proceedings, or move to a shelter. Because the type of leave needed can differ significantly from leave covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act -- and often will be non-medical -- these provisions do not amend the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in any way; however, the notice and certification requirements are very similar to those required under the FMLA.

Title VIII improves and expands the immigration protections for battered women. In addition, it would ensure that victims of trafficking are supported with measures such as permitting their families to join them in certain circumstances, expanding the duration of a T-visa, and providing resources to victims who assist in investigations or prosecutions of trafficking cases brought by state or federal authorities.

Title IX focuses more closely on violence against Native American women by creating a new tribal Deputy Director in the Office on Violence Against Women dedicated to coordinating federal policy and tribal grants. Authorizes tribal governments to access and upload domestic violence and protection order data on criminal databases, as well as create tribal sex offender registries, and strengthens available criminal penalties.

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