The Leahy Letter – News Update

February 28, 2013

Today the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Act Cleared its Final Hurdle and Heads to the President’s Desk

WASHINGTON – The House of Representatives today voted overwhelmingly to pass the Senate’s bipartisan Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act (VAWA), sending the bill to the President for signature after months of delay. Senator Patrick Leahy, lead author of the legislation, applauded the House’s move of casting partisanship aside and taking up the consensus, Senate measure. Leahy, who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee and now also is President Pro Tem of the Senate, successfully pressed to make VAWA a top early priority in the new 113th Congress. After rejecting a Republican substitute, the House passed the Leahy-Crapo Senate version of the bill in a vote of 286 to 138.

Today, the House followed the Senate’s example, and listened to the call from thousands of survivors of violence and law enforcement by passing this fully-inclusive, life-saving legislation with a bipartisan vote,” Leahy said.
Leahy, along with the bill’s lead cosponsor Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), earlier this week called on House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) to bring up the Senate-passed bill rather than act on a partisan measure. The Leahy-Crapo VAWA bill passed the Senate 78-22, with all Democrats, all women and a majority of Republicans supporting the bill. The Senate passed a nearly identical measure last April, which the House failed to consider.

“We made the Violence Against Women Act our top priority this Congress but it should not have taken this long,” Leahy said. “Still, at a time when we face gridlock and stonewalling on even the most compelling issues, I am glad to see that we could find a way to cut through all of that to help victims of violence.”

The Senate measure approved Thursday in the House renews VAWA’s charter another five years, and includes new and vital protections for college students, immigration women, tribal women and members of the LGBT community. The bill also seeks to reduce the backlog of untested rape kits throughout the country, provides needed assistance to law enforcement in prosecuting sexual assault crimes and additionally assists law enforcement in investigating human trafficking crimes by also reauthorizing for four years the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, a law that expired in September 2011. The current VAWA authorization also expired in September 2011, and the bill passed today renews the program’s charter for five years.

“I thank the many Senators and Representatives of both parties who have helped to lead this fight, and the leadership of both Houses who have prioritized moving this vital legislation. Leahy said. “But most of all, I thank the tireless victims, advocates, and service providers who have given so much of themselves to ensure that this legislation would pass and that, when it did, it would make a real difference. Lives will be better because of their work and because of this law.”

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Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On House Passage of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013
February 28, 2013

Earlier this month, the Senate came together in the best tradition of the chamber to pass the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act with a strong bipartisan vote. I am happy to report that the House of Representatives just passed the Senate-passed bill. This vital legislation will now go to the President, and it will be signed into law. It will
help victims of rape and domestic violence and victims of human trafficking who could not wait another day for us to act. This action of Congress will prevent terrible crimes and help countless victims rebuild their lives.

Today Congress showed that we still can act in a bipartisan way and put crime victims above politics. I thank Senator Crapo for being my partner on this legislation from the beginning, and I was glad when he and Senator Murkowski, another steadfast supporter, joined me on a bipartisan letter earlier this week asking Speaker Boehner to pass this legislation to help all victims of domestic and sexual violence. Today, the House followed the Senate’s example, and listened to the call from thousands of survivors of violence and law enforcement by passing this fully-inclusive, life-saving legislation with a bipartisan vote.

We made the Violence Against Women Act our top priority this Congress but it should not have taken this long. Our bill was written with the input of law enforcement, victims, and the people who work with victims every day to address real needs. None of the common sense changes it included should have been controversial. Still, at a time when we face gridlock and stonewalling on even the most compelling issues, I am glad to see that we could find a way to cut through all of that to help victims of violence.

This new law will make lives better. It will encourage and fund practices proven to help law enforcement and victim service providers reduce domestic violence homicides. It will lead to more investigation and prosecution of rape and sexual assault crimes and more services provided to victims of those crimes. It will also help eliminate backlogs of untested rape kits to help those victims receive justice and security promptly.

This reauthorization, like every VAWA reauthorization before it, takes new steps to ensure that we can reach the most vulnerable victims whose needs are not being met. For the first time, it guarantees that all victims can receive needed services, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This law strengthens protections for vulnerable immigrant victims. It ensures that colleges and universities will do more to protect students from domestic and sexual violence. This reauthorization also takes important new steps to combat the appalling epidemic of domestic violence on tribal lands and to ensure that no perpetrators of this terrible crime are above the law.

The bill that the President will sign also includes the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, which continues and strengthens effective programs to help us take on the scourge of human trafficking. It is unacceptable that 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the evils of sex trafficking and labor trafficking, forms of modern day slavery, still exist around the world and even in the United States. It has been too difficult, but I am glad that Congress is finally acting once again to address trafficking.

I will never forget going as a young prosecutor to crime scenes at 2:00 in the morning and seeing the victims of these awful crimes. As we worked on this bill, I heard the moving stories in hearings and rallies and meetings of those who survived true horrors and had the courage to share their stories in the hopes that others could be spared what they went
through. We have finally come together to honor their courage and take the action they demanded.

I thank the many Senators and Representatives of both parties who have helped to lead this fight, and the leadership of both Houses who have prioritized moving this vital legislation. I thank Representative Cole for his steadfast dedication to help preserve the protections for Native women. But most of all, I thank the tireless victims, advocates, and service providers who have given so much of themselves to ensure that this legislation would pass and that, when it did, it would make a real difference. Lives will be better because of their work and because of this law.

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