

Statement on Partisan Passage of VAWA Reauthorization 2012

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Wednesday, 16 May 2012 14:01

Originally signed into law by President Clinton in 1994, and reauthorized in 2000 and 2005 under President Bush in bi-partisan fashion, this year's process has seen Republican legislators in the House abandon bi-partisanship for politics. Instead of strengthening the protections found within VAWA, during a time where domestic violence is on the rise, the Republican bill rolls back critical protections for women everywhere, setting a dangerous trend that will put thousands of victims in serious peril. Republicans brought up this controversial bill despite the fact that the Senate passed a stronger, more comprehensive bill this April with a robust 68 to 31 bipartisan vote, recognizing that on some subject's, politics should take a backseat to real policy.

I have been an adamant supporter of VAWA since I came to Congress in 2001, recognizing the critical need for these types of programs and leading on ensuring that these programs receive the proper funding they need as a senior appropriator on the Commerce Justice Science Appropriations Subcommittee. This is why earlier this year, I introduced the Domestic Violence Judicial Support Act of 2012 focusing on improving the court programs within VAWA to ensure that our judicial system is doing all that it can do to help victims and their families. I am extremely disappointed that politics are a consideration in this gravely important piece of legislation.

I am particularly disheartened by the removal of protections for women in Indian Country that provide concurrent tribal jurisdiction over those who assault Indian spouses and dating partners on tribal lands. This would not only make it more difficult to prosecute perpetrators who commit these crimes, but would put the burden on victims to push for justice. Similarly, I am extremely concerned on the rollback of long-standing VAWA protections on the safety of battered immigrant victims that would cause serious delay and denial of protection for many spouses. This rollback combined with the weakening the U visa program would discourage immigrant victims of crime from reporting serious criminal activity. The GOP bill also fails to include key provisions, which are included in the Senate-passed bill, to protect the LGBT community. Recent studies show that LGBT victims of domestic violence face discrimination when accessing services.

Hundreds of organizations, from the U.S. Conference of Mayors to the Fraternal Order of Police to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence oppose this bill. As the bill moves to conference, I will work in my colleagues in the sincere hope that many of the strong bi-partisan provisions found in the Senate bill are found in the eventual legislation.