

April 22, 2004

**Statement of Senator John McCain Regarding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking* Campaign**

Arizona, more than many other states -- maybe most states -- has been afflicted with the scourge of human trafficking and smuggling for far too long. The problem has become even more acute here since the federal government began devoting an inordinate amount of resources to discouraging illegal immigration in Texas and California in the 1990s. That has created a funnel-like situation where most of the illegal immigrant population seeking to enter the United States comes through the southern Arizona desert.

As the problem has become more visible, and more federal resources have finally been devoted to interdiction efforts in Arizona, the price of entry has become extremely costly. If current estimates are true, the going price to get smuggled into the United States through southern Arizona is around \$1,600. Given the relative difference in the health and scales of the economies of Central and Southern American nations, and the United States, that price represents significantly more than what most of us here today think of when we think of *sixteen hundred dollars*. This is not to mention the fact that many of these desperate border crossers pay the ultimate price for their passage. Last year over 200 people died crossing into the United States through the Arizona deserts.

Human trafficking is one of the many tragic repercussions of a national immigration policy that is more and more becoming revealed as an abject failure. We are notified of its occurrence every time we pick up the newspaper and read of another "drop house" raid in one of our metropolitan areas. The local office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) advised me that in 1997 they apprehended, in one 24-hour period, more than 700 undocumented immigrants who were being harbored in drop houses throughout the Valley. Between August 2000 and July 2001 they apprehended 15,000 more. And in the last few months we have seen drop house raids in affluent areas of metro Phoenix and Tucson net nearly 1,000 aliens waiting to be moved throughout the nation.

We know that when these people cannot pay their passage in full they are dealt with extremely harshly by their smugglers. While some are brutally murdered "execution style" and left to be found in secluded areas throughout our suburban and rural landscapes, others are trafficked into slave labor and the illegal commercial sex industry throughout the country.

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I commend Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson for launching this campaign here, and in Atlanta and Philadelphia, in an attempt to come to the aid of the victims of the human trafficking predators operating in Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. I also

congratulate and applaud the many state and local government agencies, as well as the several Non Governmental Organizations and faith-based institutions who are represented here today for their commitment to cooperatively addressing the problem of human trafficking in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

I particularly would like to applaud U.S. Attorney Paul Charlton for the great work he is doing to comprehensively address the problem of illegal immigration in Arizona. Mr. Charlton's office is one of the first U.S. Attorneys' Offices in the nation to recognize the multi-faceted nature of the problem. He understands all too well that the "coyotes" who smuggle people across our international border are equally engaged in the illegal drug trade. Today he is demonstrating his longstanding acknowledgment that they are also engaged in the disgusting practice of human trafficking throughout our state and the nation.

His office is accruing a commendable record of bringing these people to justice. According to the local ICE, in the last several months this U.S. Attorney's office has prosecuted over 150 smugglers for a variety of offenses, including "harboring and smuggling, hostage taking, kidnapping, firearms violations, assault, and money laundering." We are lucky to have him in Arizona and I am proud to call him my U.S. Attorney.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the Bush Administration for their efforts to address not only the symptoms of a failed immigration policy by launching this campaign, but also the larger disease by proposing comprehensive immigration reform that includes a guest worker program. If the Congress would act on Mr. Bush's proposal – or one of the several others that have been introduced in this Congress – it would eviscerate the market for people smugglers by providing a legal avenue for the vast majority of those subjected to this despicable practice to enter the United States.

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