

Human Trafficking Conversation Series: In Our Backyard

Kurt: What I would like to do now is just say a couple more words about the McCain Institute's efforts in human trafficking, and then turn it over to our two fantastic speakers tonight.

The McCain Institute was established a couple of years ago now, with a focus on character-driven leadership, and applying that sense of character and values throughout areas of work, of humanitarian work, human rights, and national security.

In the humanitarian area, very early on, we decided that one of the issues that needs more attention and more focus, and where we can try to move the needle is the area of human trafficking. We have worked very closely, supporting the efforts of Mrs. McCain, who was named the co-chair of the governor's task force in Arizona on human trafficking, and is now the co-chair of the ongoing committee to pursue this issue over time.

We've had tremendous success, thanks in large part to the awareness building that Mrs. McCain and others have done and the work of that task force.

Arizona, earlier this year, approved new legislation giving significant new powers to law enforcement. At the human trafficking council meeting, just yesterday in Arizona, the FBI representative present said that Arizona really stands as a model among many states for the tools that it is making available to pursue this crime in Arizona.

That's really thanks largely to the awareness-building efforts and the task force work co-chaired by Mrs. McCain. We're very proud at the McCain Institute to have done some of the technical support to help bring that about.

We're interested in learning more. We sponsor research through Arizona State University, some original research, that is helping establish a fact-driven data baseline for what sex trafficking really means in Arizona. We're interested in using technology and looking at how the Internet is used to exploit people for human trafficking, but how it also can be used to track human trafficking and disrupt networks.

We're interested, obviously, in making this not only something that we pursue as an institute, or that is pursued in Arizona through the task force, but something that becomes a focus and a national focus and an international focus, so that we really do make a fundamental difference in putting this heinous practice to an end.

With that, I want to introduce again Mrs. Cindy McCain, who has made this one of her crusades. When you know that she has a crusade, you just get out of the way.

[laughter]

Kurt: This has been tremendously successful. We're so pleased to be working together with Mrs. McCain on this. As you saw, we had originally invited John Ryan from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Unfortunately, he's unable to be

with us tonight for some personal reasons.

We are delighted to have Senior Vice President and General Counsel for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Yiota Souras.

With that, let me turn it over to the two of you. Mrs. McCain, off you go.

Cindy McCain: Thank you, Kurt. Thank you. First of all, we still have Heidi online. Can you hear us, Heidi? Senator. I'm sorry.

Senator Heidi Heitkamp: I can. I'm going to stay as long as I can, Cindy.

Cindy: I have a specific question for you, is why. I'd like you to address the group about our Native American issue more in depth.

Senator Heitkamp: We are very concerned about what's happening on our reservations and very concerned about what's happening with urban Indian populations. When you look at the report that was released today, I don't know if you've had a chance to see it Cindy, it was the one that Senator Dorgan was working with the Department of Justice on. It shows a record and a history of victimization of Native American children that is unmatched or unparalleled, in this country, among any other ethnic group.

Taking what I said earlier, which is that the grooming of the candidate for trafficking tends to go to lower income, tends to go to kids who've been victimized in the past. Automatically, that puts them at a category that is hugely at risk.

Beyond that, we have a jurisdictional challenge on Indian country in the United States, especially Indian country now, where we have this oil boom at the same time. The federal government has major crime prosecutorial responsibility on my reservations, but they don't have a major law enforcement presence.

I'm not exaggerating to tell you that in many cases it's lawlessness, frequently, on reservations. It is open season for victimization. I just talked to a tribal judge this morning, who told me of various conclaves or pockets within the reservation at the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation. They know trafficking is happening.

By the name the neighbors report it, they've cleared out. It's very mobile. It's very, very difficult to get a handle on. We have a natural population that is subject to victimization. We have to look at this in a special category because of the jurisdictional challenges, especially when it occurs on the reservation.

Frequently, the other concern that I have is that for treatment of the victims. I talk to prosecutors in Minnesota. We have a lot of urban Indians in Minnesota, who then migrate on and off the reservations, on and off Indian country.

Young girl left by her mother in Minneapolis, falls in with the wrong crowd, needs a place to sleep, needs food, needs the comforts of home, gets groomed into that life. Eventually, she's a willing participant in a prosecution. She vanishes. No one knows where she is. No one's done the follow-up. No one's done the treatment. It's probably

likely she's back in the life.

We have such a unique issue and such a unique responsibility, I think, to native children. We've got to segregate that, and Cindy knows how passionate I am about this issue and how passionate I am about protecting all children of this country, but particularly Native American children.

Cindy: Thank you, and we'll release you. Please go. [laughs] I don't want to keep you any longer. Make a run for the floor. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.

Senator Heitkamp: Thank you! We'll see you later, Cindy. Bye-bye.

Cindy: Yiota, thank you very much for coming. I am so pleased to see all of you here, too. I'm really, I was really anxious to get that question answered from Senator Heitkamp because it is obviously an issue that affects Arizona as well and many other southwestern and western states.

I am so pleased to have you here. For many reasons, but we were chatting on the phone earlier today and to have a legal aspect of this, someone with a legal eye on it and a legal thought process on this is extremely important. Because that's where we're at right now nationally, is in the process of not only formulating good legislation, but passing it. I'm really glad you're here, for a number of reasons.

Anyway, I'd like to start with what I'd call a lot of these conversations. I know there's many of you in the audience that have a history with human trafficking. You work in the arena. You're with an NGO, whatever it may be. But I would like to start with, for those online, human trafficking 101.

Can you tell us exactly what human trafficking is and is there a real definition, one definition for it?

Yiota Souras: I certainly think different nonprofits that focus perhaps on sex trafficking or labor trafficking, etc., might have a slightly different definition.

At NCMEC, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, we focus on child sex trafficking, and we generally would look at that as any scenario where a child is placed in a situation where they are trading sex for something else. It could be money. It could be money to a third party. It could be money to themselves. But it could also be exchange for anything else. A bed for the night, food, etc.

Cindy: Food, shelter.

Yiota: Exactly.

Cindy: I know that we were chatting earlier and I said my biggest frustration, one of my biggest frustrations in this when I began all this, was the disbelief that it actually occurs. That it, "Oh, no, that happens in Cambodia. That happens in India. It doesn't happen here." I met with a prominent newspaper who said just that to me. That we don't believe it exists. You're going to have to prove it to us, and this is a major newspaper.

I'd like to find out from you what NCMEC has done to not only prove it, but to prove to the disbelievers. Not just proving it to those of us who know it exists, but giving us data, but to the disbelievers.

Yiota: NCMEC began a little over 30 years ago really focusing on missing children issues. We added to that a focus on exploited children issues, especially online exploitation. The distribution of online child pornography, for instance.

Several years ago we started to see a correlation between the two departments. We were starting to see children who had gone missing, mostly runaways, who were then also turning up in an exploited case. That was very eye-opening to us and really showed us a problem that was emerging.

So about three years ago we actually started a child sex trafficking team within the organization. It is a combination of the missing and the exploited departments that we have, so that we can actually bring the analytics and the information that we're receiving from the public and from the other resources we have, to really focus on those missing children who are at risk for trafficking or who we know are being trafficked, again, who might be exploited and we're receiving reports from them on that side as well.

We have seen an increasing growth in those reports. Last year alone we received over 10,000 reports of child sex trafficking. I would just add, there's no requirement for those reports to be made to NCMEC. That is just voluntary individuals and companies, when they see potential child sex trafficking, who are making those reports to us. So that we can process those and pass them onto law enforcement, hopefully to recover that child.

In about the past five years where we have been really tracking these numbers, we've seen a 1,432 percent increase in the number of child sex trafficking reports.

Cindy: Say that one more time.

Yiota: 1,432 percent increase in the number of child sex trafficking reports received at NCMEC.

Cindy: I can't even fathom how much that is, how big that is.

Yiota: Some of that is awareness, which is wonderful. Awareness of NCMEC as a resource of child sex trafficking as a problem to be reported, for people to reach out for assistance to children. But we could also look at it as an increasing proliferation of the problem as well. Online child sex trafficking is a huge problem. We see an increasing number of those reports in the reports we've received over the past five years.

Cindy: Does the training or lack of training on the part of the police departments have anything to do...I know more police departments are now trained in this area, but part of that training has to do with being able to recognize that a child that is perhaps abused in front of you, or homeless, or whatever, may be also a victim of sex trafficking.

I know we've had a great deal of emphasis on training in Arizona. How does this play in

with what you're seeing?

Yiota: It's definitely a factor. We look at the issue of child sex trafficking as three main factors. It's multifaceted, of course, but identifying, locating, and recovering. Those are huge areas, of course, to cover, but identifying is a tremendous issue.

We've started to do some outreach and training not only to law enforcement, social workers, but also to schools and communities. Those are very important people in children's lives, who might notice that a child might be falling into a trafficking situation or might have some risk factors for that. It's tremendously important.

I agree with you, Mrs. McCain. It's been increasing, where law enforcement are aware of the issues, are taking advantage of the training opportunities, but there could be a lot more out there.

Cindy: That was one of the largest emphases that our task force at home took up in all of this, and I'm happy to say it's been a little bit successful too. The reason I brought up the Native American issue with Heidi was because there has been, from our calculations anyway, there were 96 human trafficking bills passed in 2014, on a state level.

[laughter]

Cindy: We were talking backstage. I said, "This is very frustrating because there's a lot going on." We, in Arizona, had one bill last year. I now know of 20-some, 30-some bills that are being proposed this year.

There seems to be a lot of duplication in all of this. I'd just like your assessment on that. What should we be doing, from a state level, to make this a little easier and a little better?

Yiota: First of all, I'd echo the fact that it's tremendous that that number of states and legislatures are focusing on the issue, are trying to find solutions and then being responsive to the community needs, but it's very difficult.

It's very difficult I think for law enforcement, prosecutors, and even service providers, when multiple bills are up for discussion or passed, might be a little overlapping, might be a little contradictory.

I think some of the themes that have come out in some of the pending federal legislation that has been discussed, the safe harbor issue that Senator Heitkamp, of course...

Cindy: Go into the safe harbor issue a little bit with that.

Yiota: The concept of safe harbor really is two-pronged. One is the concept that a child who law enforcement perhaps has recovered from a trafficking situation is a victim and is a survivor once they get recovered, is not a criminal who's committed the crime of prostitution, or solicitation, or any one of the other number of laws that may be on the books statewide.

Again, it's the concept that that child needs to be diverted out of the criminal system. Sometimes, it's an immediate diversion, where the child will not be charged with

prostitution or other related crimes. Sometimes, it is a two-step process where the crimes will be pending until the child completes certain social services and other treatment options.

The first is really legal. The second though is really providing services to that child. When that child gets recovered from a trafficking scenario, in a sting operation or something else, they have the clothes on their back, and they have nothing else.

They do not have anywhere to go get their stuff and go somewhere else. They do not likely have other friends or family that, at that moment, they can go back to.

It's also the immediate ability to provide services to that child, for that child to know where they're going to sleep that night, where they're going to be in two weeks, what's going to happen to them next, to really try to get them not only physically out of that trafficking scenario, but also into a real recovery process.

That's really the concept of safe harbor. It's a wonderful thing. It's pending in Senator Heitkamp's and Senator Klobuchar's bill right now, and it's been the subject of a lot of discussion this year on the Hill.

Cindy: I just was out in Minnesota, visiting one of Senator Klobuchar's facilities that she really triumphs and talks about. It indeed was a tremendous facility. It was an all-encompassing facility. Whatever girls or boys wind up in that facility get a full range of services. They have things available to them for a length of time. It is really lovely.

The portion of that that is also addressed but, I think, in a little bit different way is the treatment of johns, which was just raised by Senator Heitkamp. They send their johns, in Minnesota, to john school. The cost of the john school is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$900.

The monies all go to help treat these kids that have been so terribly abused. They spend one or two days. I'm not quite sure what it is. Then they get a slap on the wrist, and they're out of there. First of all, what do you think of that aspect of this, and do you think it's strong enough?

Yiota: Initially, any...

Cindy: What would you do differently if you were going to?

Yiota: Any preventative measure or any efforts to address demand are positive. We know not all states are doing that uniformly or enough. I do think the concept of a john school, to use that term, is very inadequate. These are individuals who have tried to buy a child...

Cindy: Predators.

Yiota: ...to rape that child. They are predators and offenders. They likely, we know, just given the proliferation of the crime, the time that they were arrested is likely not the first time that they tried to or did buy a child for sex.

The concept of having something equivalent to perhaps a driver's ed school for someone that's gotten too many speeding tickets so they can be remediated in that sense, I think falls a bit short. It is a very violent and long-lasting crime that they perpetrate, and I think it needs to be treated as such.

Cindy: Out West, when we began all of this, the word that we used to talk about them is "child abusers." In my opinion, and this is just my opinion, I believe they are child abusers. I believe that they should be treated as such.

There is a conflicting discussion out West about how we treat them. People said, "Let's publish their pictures in the newspaper," which we used to do in Arizona. We don't do that anymore. We raised this in one of our first meetings and said, "What about publishing the pictures in the newspaper?"

I kid you not. A law enforcement person, no names, said, "He might get hurt. His wife might hurt him." It's like living in...For me, I'm like on the moon or something. I can't believe the stuff these guys say. Anyway.

I don't know what's right. Shame is a great deterrent in all of this. I like the idea of funding some of the victim services in this, but I agree with you. I don't think one day or a driver's ed school, as you put it, is necessarily the right way to go about this.

Yiota: No, and again...

Cindy: Should it be legislated?

Yiota: I'm coming a little bit more from the legal standpoint. I think there are some recent court decisions which are strengthening how prosecutors can approach buyers in this scenario. There was a great land-breaking case last year out in South Dakota, close to Senator Heitkamp's area, which for the first time held that a buyer, or an attempted buyer, of a child for sex could be treated as a trafficker under the trafficking statute.

A very strong decision, but it only covers a few states. Basically what that does, to give a little further explanation, is it opens up additional penalties for individuals who try to buy children for sex.

Those kind of cases I think are tremendously powerful. There's a deterrence factor as well when you have case law that can give sentencing of that sort to potential buyers. Some of the studies have shown the probability of them getting arrested and the sentencing they may receive they have vocalized as being big deterrent factors.

There certainly is shaming. There's education. There's very harsh prosecution also that I think can be a powerful deterrent.

Cindy: We just had a guy in Phoenix, obviously I've very involved in this in Arizona. There was a big sting in Tempe, Arizona, [inaudible 20:15] ASU, not ASU was involved, but it was the area where it was at. Anyway, one of the men that was picked up in it, and these were all children that were rescued from this, but one of the men that was picked up

in it had put a question on backpage.com saying he wanted to find a cheerleader.

Indeed he did find a cheerleader, a 14-year-old cheerleader that wound up being a student at the high school he taught at. I kid you not, this just happened in Arizona.

It's stuff like that that's going on, but the fact is the sting was big, it was hardcore, and they got these guys. Let me tell you, the ripple effect of this has been very interesting in Arizona. We've seen some more, but anyway, I'm all for big stings.

We've been talking about federal legislation. We've talked about the johns a little bit. We've talked about the efforts that you all are doing. But I'd like to talk more in-depth about training. Training and how we educate our own communities.

From your standpoint, from the missing children standpoint, I know training's very important. I know that you do that. I know that you participate and help other organizations do that. But are we doing it the right way, by just focusing on the police or should we educate the general public?

Woman 2: I think it has to be much broader. I think to address the first responder need, let's say law enforcement, social workers, individuals who are coming into direct contact with these children, is immensely important. Those are the first two training programs that NCMEC has rolled out. One directed to law enforcement and prosecutors, and a second training program really on forensic interviewing. Individuals who are trying to draw the story out and some of the details of these children's' experiences once they're recovered.

At the same time, we are also starting to shift and focus more on community awareness, and especially to children, teenagers so they can be aware of potential luring or potential suggestions that they may receive, whether it's online or otherwise, so they're aware this is a problem.

This has to be done in the appropriate manner for the age group, but that sort of awareness is very important. Again, schools, immensely important, I think. Some schools will see a child more than their own family members might, just given school schedules. Their ability to notice changes in a child's demeanor, or dress, or absences from school can be very vital in either preventing an issue or being able to pull back a child who may be starting the entry into a trafficking experience.

Cindy: I'm sure that educating hospital workers as well, because that was raised with us. We felt not only was it important, but it was utterly necessary now, because so many of these kids wind up in the ER or wind up at some point having an interaction with the medical fields, yeah.

Yiota: That's a great point.

Cindy: One of the things I'm curious about for myself is law enforcement and the use of the word prostitution. I'd like to know really what you think, your view on this. Should we be doing that a little bit differently? I have a hard time calling a 12-year-old child a

prostitute.

Yiota: We've categorically moved away from the term prostitution within NCMEC. Organization-wide it is not a term we recognize. It is not an appropriate term. A 12-year-old cannot be a prostitute. An 11-year-old, a 17-year-old. We use the term child sex trafficking victim, or child sex trafficking survivor. That is done uniformly.

There is a wonderful piece of legislation that's pending right now which would actually alter the enacting legislation that NCMEC has to change the term child prostitution from the one of the areas we focus on to child sex trafficking. We think that is very in keeping with how all the service providers are referring to this problem.

Cindy: Not only do I agree with that, but at least we're trying to make a serious effort in changing the language and changing the approach to this. It's difficult, though.

Yiota: It changes the mindset, also. For law enforcement especially who might be used to the criminalization of prostituting and what that means, and the statutes criminalizing that sort of activity, to approach a child and immediately think of victim or survivor, and not the word prostitute in their head.

For that child, not to hear that term when they are, again, brought in from a sting operation or something like that, for them not to hear themselves referred to as that term is very powerful also, we feel.

Cindy: Let's go offshore for a minute. I know that you all do...You're very active offshore, and organized crime, because this is the bigger picture in all of this, is how organized it is.

Would you tell our audience and talk a little bit about organization, who this effects, what kind of money involved, all those kinds of things?

Yiota: Sure. The money question is always a very difficult one.

Cindy: I think it's big.

Yiota: I think we're going to guess it's a big number. [laughs] It is a very deregulated business. I would call it a business. There certainly are anecdotal stories of traffickers who might work together and certainly work children across the country, so they're not even localized, let's say. They might have a circuit of cities where they have connections or where they will bring girls and boys who are being trafficked around a certain circuit. It might be in the Northeast, it might be here in the Southwest, but they will keep to that, let's say, business model, because that is one that works and one that they feel secure in.

The money is not something that NCMEC tracks. There are other organizations that put estimates out. We know that some of the online advertisers, such as backpage, and some of the other companies out there charge for ads, and they charge for escort ads only. When we say escort ads, those are prostitution ads. That includes ads of children being trafficked as well. Those number are estimated in the many millions a year in revenue.

Cindy: I had someone describe this to me a while back, actually it has stuck with me. You can sell guns, drugs, animals, animal parts and things that they collect in Africa and other places, you can sell them once. You can sell a child over, and over, and over again.

The McCain Institute has estimated that one child is worth in the neighborhood of a half a million dollars to a trafficker or a pimp. A half a million dollars for one child. If you've got a stable of six or seven children, you're in the money.

One of the things that we have talked about a great deal is the propensity for this to move offshore. One of the arguments that was given to us particularly, and we'll get into backpage, I'm saving the best for last. But a lot of these online advertisings and all these things say, "Well, if you stop it here, it will just move it offshore. If we keep it onshore, then we can watch it, we can keep control of it." That was actually said to me one time.

I guess my question to you is, it's already offshore, and it's offshore in a major way. How far off and how far deep does this go, do you think?

Yiota: As far as the international spread of it?

Cindy: Yeah, and where are the tentacles leading in this?

Yiota: To speak from NCMEC's experience, we certainly see on the exploitation side that child pornography images, and I'm going to relate them in some way, is absolutely a worldwide issue. We receive reports from around the world, including the US of course. But anyone with an Internet connection has the ability to run this business, post ads, provide trafficking victims and really engage in this kind of activity.

I do not think we should think of it as a US problem, even if there's current examples of US problems for us to address. In that area I think it is absolutely an international issue.

Cindy: Is this a national security issue?

Yiota: I don't know that I would go that far. Again, just from our viewpoint we're really focusing on the children in this issue and not so much the flow of money or information that might go along with it.

Cindy: Yeah, I think the deeper we get into this -- I don't disagree with you, but I will add to that -- I think the deeper we delve into this and the farther we follow the money and the farther we follow the tentacles in all of this, I think it becomes a national security problem because it's going to lead to the worst of the worst. The guys with the black flags that are in these countries all over the world now.

It's been proposed that that's what's going on. It has not been completely proved yet. I think that out there only because that is something the McCain Institute is working on right now to get into that aspect of human trafficking.

Two things. Super Bowl. I think a lot of people are disillusioned and probably think, "Oh, this will end when the Super Bowl's over, shut the woman up for heaven's sake." Does this end when the Super Bowl ends?

Yiota: This is a problem every day, everywhere.

Cindy: Did it begin with the Super Bowl?

Yiota: Absolutely not. It doesn't begin and end with any of the big sports events by any means. Again, it's great if there is focus around the Super Bowl, additional discussions and things of that sort. Every day is a day we should be discussing this problem. If the Super Bowl creates and generates additional discussion, I think that's wonderful. But it will go on the next day. It's going on now. It will go on next year as well. No connections certainly to the Super Bowl, per se.

Cindy: That's been part of our push out West, is to make people understand this is just a catalyst and not the reason, and not the end-all to all of this. It is only the beginning. We are fortunate, or perhaps not fortunate, in Arizona. In the month of January we had five or six major events, Pro Bowl, Super Bowl, the Waste Management Open, the Barrett-Jackson Car Show and about four other major events just in the month of January.

We're a state that, quite frankly, should have gotten our act together sooner. I believe we're going to have the ability in Arizona to not only track this, but to collect the data that's going to mean something down the road with this. We already are in the process of doing that, ASU and others.

The exciting part of this is that people are now beginning to understand it's real. Not everyone's there yet. But law enforcement, our large businesses, the Hotel-Motel Association, all those kinds of things are now coming together. That's where I bring up to you the influences. How can the airlines help us? How can hotels help us? How can the NFL help us? How can all these organizations that are mixed up in just this one event, how can they help, and do it in the long term?

Yiota: I think, again, awareness is number one. Education of their employees, especially if we're talking about hotels.

Cindy: Training and education, yeah.

Yiota: Training and education. How do you identify this scenario maybe going on? What do you do when you see it? How do you feel comfortable thinking well that maybe is a customer of the hotel, I shouldn't raise an issue, or it's a customer of the airline, etc. To understand the criminal aspect of this and the need to really get involved.

I think sticking with it is the big issue. Again, wonderful if individuals or corporations coalesce around the Super Bowl to make a big push and to offer services. But it has to be sustained. It's not a problem that's going to go away afterwards.

Cindy: Right. I tell people when I talk to them, I use the old TSA adage. I can't believe I'm agreeing with TSA on anything. But anyway, TSA, see something, say something. We have tried to just bang that home, at least on home on this, because we're not encouraging people to become vigilantes, by any stretch. But if you see something that in your gut you know is wrong or something's not right with it, tell somebody in charge or tell somebody

that has the ability to perhaps do something about it or look into it.

That's been I think for us, anyway, that's a big hurdle for us. But it's going to be interesting to see how this all plays out during this timeframe, the month of January and afterwards. Because keeping it, like you said, keeping it rolling, keeping it exciting, keeping it on the front page is really important in this.

Yiota: Absolutely. It's essential.

Cindy: Backpage. Would you describe to those people in the audience that don't know backpage is and what they do? Would you explain in depth? I know you've mentioned it, but a little bit...

Yiota: Sure. Backpage is an online classified advertising website. It is similar to Craigslist, which some of you might be aware of.

Cindy: Let me interrupt here. I'm just so proud because the two owners of this are in Phoenix, Arizona. Just throwing that out for you.

Yiota: It is a website where one could consider going and locating their state and city if they're from a major city, and then locating advertisements for, perhaps, to buy a sofa, or perhaps to buy concert tickets, or sell a car. Or, in the case especially of backpage and given their ad volume, to buy someone for sex.

They have a very large escort section that is broken down into different types of activities. But predominantly it is a site where you can click on link, after link, after link. They will be ads of individuals, girls and boys, adults and children, who are dressed in extremely revealing clothing, if very little clothing also, in highly sexually suggestive positions with text describing that individual and what they might be selling to you.

There's often a coded price of some sort as well by the half-hour or by the hour, etc. If you take a website like backpage you will see a few ads for sofas, and a few ads for concert tickets, and a tremendous volume of escort ads.

It's also a website where you can post for free to sell your sofa, or to sell your concert tickets, but they charge for escort ads and they charge by the market. If you're in New York City the market rules, and that's an expensive ad. If you're in a small town in Ohio, let's say, it's a cheaper ad. They go by the market according to the geographic location, and the ads are quite steep and that is where they make their revenue.

Cindy: Is it similar to what Craigslist is?

Yiota: It is similar in concept and layout.

Cindy: What's different?

Yiota: What is primarily different is that several years ago Craigslist, under some public pressure, and on the heels of a hearing on the Hill to question them about their business practices, closed down their adult section. Which was having a tremendous problem not only with prostitution ads in general, but with child sex trafficking ads, with children

being trafficked in large volumes on the site.

A lot of that traffic seems to have, if you track the timeframes, moved to backpage and that area has grown tremendously on backpage. They still have a full-blown escort section where they allow those ads to proliferate.

Cindy: Can you describe to our audience what backpage's excuse is for this and what they say they're doing to prevent this?

Yiota: Backpage has, through the media, and hearings, and really other public occasions, really cast themselves in the light of being, in the words of one of their officials, the sheriff of the Internet. So a company that is doing everything they possibly can to protect children, to screen ads to report to law enforcement or to assist law enforcement when there might be illegal activity going on on their website and to really be as helpful as possible regarding these ads.

That is how they balance when they are criticized quite often about the content on their website is they say, "We actually are helping the situation."

Cindy: The issue that they've hidden behind for so long is that of the constitution and freedom of speech, which is a tough one. That's, clearly we all believe in that, but in this case I think it's a real dicey one. What's pending? I know we have two sets of lawsuits going on in Washington and Massachusetts, right?

Yiota: Yes. It's a really fascinating development. We've talked about legislation on the trafficking issue, state and federal. We've talked about grassroots community awareness. I think there's a third really interesting front here which is emerging which is civil litigation.

There are two pending cases right now that have been filed against backpage by multiple victims. They're all women, in this scenario, but who were trafficked as young girls on backpage for sex for an extended period of time. There's one case that's pending in the Washington State Supreme Court, and there's one case that was just filed in Massachusetts Federal Court.

Both of these cases are very different. They definitely are trying to address the issues and the business practices of backpage. As Mrs. McCain noted, to not allow backpage to hide behind their freedom of speech or what I would also refer to as the Communications Decency Act, which is a statute which generally protects Internet service providers, but not allow them to hide behind that anymore.

Cindy: I agree. One of the things that was mentioned to me from some people out in Arizona was, what about at least getting together with the credit card companies and working together to stop the use of credit cards on these sites that are specifically of sale of women and children. Does that have any ability to go anywhere? Or what's your opinion?

Yiota: I think it's a tremendously powerful idea. They charge for these ads. We know that, and the credit card is the vehicle that they use to do that. In fairness, the credit card

can also be used on other parts of the site. This is where some of these Internet websites get very difficult when you're thinking about regulating or carving out the bad activity that's on them. But I think it's an idea that has a tremendous amount of potential.

Cindy: One of the things that we were talking about backstage was, she mentioned them hiding behind and calling themselves the sheriff of the Internet. They propose to say that they check all of these purchased ads for age, for propriety, for/ making sure that everything's in line, that all of these children are protected, and that they actually turn the information over to law enforcement.

Now I know that they turn some things over to you. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Yiota: Sure. Backpage is one of the companies that does make voluntary reports to NCMEC. They are not under an obligation to do so. They do make reports to us of ads that for some reason they believe has a connection to child sex trafficking. They typically don't provide us much more information than that.

We of course will work that report as we would any other and make it available to law enforcement. But they do talk a lot about their moderation. How they have word searches and block certain words and block certain images, and age, and that sort of thing. But they don't have any age verification whatsoever on the website.

There are certain measures which they certainly could adopt to drastically diminish the amount of child sex trafficking on their site, and they have simply chosen not to.

Cindy: They've made a conscious decision not to.

Yiota: Absolutely.

Cindy: I believe that they should go the way of Craigslist and take it completely down. Not the whole website, but take the sex ads completely off the site. But they're not listening to me. I don't understand. They're not listening.

Listen, we've got a few minutes left. I'd like to open it to questions, if you all would like. Please when you stand up and talk, do we have microphones or anything? Raise your hand and introduce us to you, please, and who you're here representing or not representing. Right here. Wait for the...Right there. Thank you.

Mike Berry: My name is Mike Berry. Good evening, Mrs. McCain. I appreciate what you're hearing. I have traveled throughout the country and familiarized myself all across the states of various organizations. It is a very entangled thing.

One of the questions I have for you is, what is being done with the two slave ships, Facebook and Google? That's the first one. I think I have more concern when you talk about taking down backpage. They only have to shift over to Mark Zuckerberg's group, and there are several people that are trying to put pressure on him to not address this. They say, "Well, we can't get our hands on this."

The second question I have is, is that most organizations across the country are not

addressing the rescue sides, what happens to the children afterwards. They keep going after the johns or they keep going after the pimps, when actually we have people who have come forward that are now admitting to, I'm talking about that this is a big business run by madams and large pimp...

There's actually a pimp award, ceremony, like the Academy Awards in Chicago. They've given two madams, one out of Washington and another in Chicago, the pimp of the year award for trafficking children.

Cindy: Only in America.

Mike: My question to you is why are we staying down on these lower levels when there are legislative pieces that could be addressed and addressing this from a business standpoint. Because you've got Facebook, you've got Google, you've got this operation which is run by the crime families and whoever. I don't see any movement on a federal level, as well as a state level, to go after these corporations.

Cindy: I'll answer from the NGO level, and then if you'd like to take a crack at some of this. First of all, thank you for your question. The Facebook aspect and the Google aspect, I've had direct discussions with them, and I'm a very small cog all of this. I've had direct discussions with them not only on stopping this, but participating in fixing this.

Google, for instance. When you Google pimp on Google, what comes up? These guys dressed in furs and Cadillacs. They glamorize being a pimp. Now I realize we can't control information, but maybe one or two of those pictures could be some lousy guy that's got tattoos and he's in jail. Maybe something. It's just a changing in attitudes. You know what I'm saying?

But I can assure you that the woman that is in charge of Facebook is all over this and she is a huge anti-slavery person. Rest assured, there are people at top that get it and they want to fix it. That's with Facebook, I mean. Google, I believe is the same way. They're not in this to harm anybody.

It's a difficult, slow transition. Because it's changing mindsets, it's changing attitudes. It's also working under the guidance of what we believe is a free and fair country that believes in the flow of information. I leave those, you asked about federal legislation. I am sorry that our senator is not here, because I would really like to have heard that answer from her. Do you have anything to add to that from the legislative aspect?

Yiota: Sure. I think there are attempts and certainly discussion about how to approach this from, perhaps a business sense, a regulatory sense as well perhaps. The Internet is fairly new, really, as let's say an industry at large. It is facing perhaps increasing regulation in some ways, but it's really crafting it from the beginning.

These are very hard concepts, and as Mrs. McCain noted, it's a core belief in this country that the Internet should be free and open in many ways. I think that's something everybody is for, with some protective measures. It's how to put those in place that's very difficult.

I know there's some pending legislation that goes towards addressing companies in particular on the SAVE Act, as it's called, that's been sponsored by Senator Kirk and others. Very new still, probably subject to a tremendous amount of discussion. But there are some very good attempts being made to address the issue from a business manner as well.

Cindy: I think the more that we generate discussion and concern on our part to our legislators, the further we're going to get with this. Reasonable legislation, also, that makes sense in all of this. It's a really hard issue. You obviously work in the issue. It's a very difficult issue.

I sometimes have to work beyond it not being a women's issue, number one, and number two, defining to our male groups out here, I need help from the men here. This is a men's issue too. I scold my men at home when I talk to them.

Not literally, but we need your help. You need to be the ones that tell your fellow men in the neighborhood, "This is wrong. Real men don't buy children. They don't buy children." But you have to tell them that, and you have to believe in it when you tell them. I really, I try to do my best. I'm only one person in all of this, but we'll see what we can do. Yes, ma'am. Could you stand up and, thank you.

Barbara Dello: My name is Barbara Dello and I was a school nurse, and I have seven children, and I've heard a lot of gossip about this issue that has haunted me, so I came today. I wanted to ask you if these things I hear are correct. I live in the New York area and the gambling casinos are very popular, and if the kids get into debt they're expected to work it off.

Kids don't want to talk...

Cindy: Are these underage children that are gambling? Is that what you're talking about?

Barbara: Well, they're high school kids. Yes, so that would be, most of them would be underage, yeah. Or maybe, I don't know. Maybe it's their 18th birthday they all go, or they go with fake IDs. I don't know. They don't want to talk because of threats of bodily harm, hurting someone you love, threats of having something on you like pictures or something you've done, or they've been given drugs to take off the edge and then they need the drugs.

I also called the police once about a marginalized child and said they were missing and they said they don't look for them for 24 to 48 hours, which seems unbelievable to me. And the fact that it happens to boys as well as girls. I just wanted to ask if that's consistent with what you guys know.

Cindy: Would you take that?

Yiota: Sure. I'm not familiar with the gambling mention that you made at the beginning of your remarks, but frankly all the other factors that you noted for why children perhaps don't extricate themselves from these situations or don't seek assistance even when they are brought in, perhaps from a sting operation. The threats to family, threats to

themselves. Perhaps a drug or substance abuse issue anecdotally are all things that we have heard and seen in cases as well.

Children are often really schooled in a story to tell when they are picked up by law enforcement. Specifically told, for instance not obviously to release their pimp's or their trafficker's name. Again, going back to the organization level of this, there's a plan in place for when the child gets arrested, what it is they do so that they get out soon and that's the end of it. Threats are a tremendous part of it as well.

You mentioned the last aspect about boys. I don't think that can be understated enough. Boys and transgender children as well are often really the forgotten victims. We think of girls. Girls certainly are the majority of reports that we see and that we read about in the news, but again anecdotally, historically NCMEC has seen about one percent of child sex trafficking reports concerning boys. In the past couple of years that has increased to four percent.

Again, perhaps an increase in awareness that boys can be victims of this crime, and just awareness of the crime in general. But I think it's, again, just a refinement of how we're looking at this problem as a community.

Cindy: In the back, stripe. Striped. I'm sorry. Striped shirt.

Olivia Enos: Hi. I'm Olivia Enos. I work at the Heritage Foundation as a research assistant in the Asian studies center. My colleague and I are currently working on a paper on human trafficking in Asia. While we are primarily focusing on an international aspect to things, we recognize that the state department in the US has played a really huge role in bringing about awareness. Also that there's a role for the US in modeling good human trafficking policy for the rest of the world.

One particular area that we've been studying is the vital importance of local law enforcement. Would you guys be able to list a couple of really effective local law enforcement programs that are working effectively to prosecute traffickers and ensure that victims are getting the proper restitution and rehabilitation that they need?

Cindy: Go ahead, if you'd like to take that. I've got some too, so go ahead.

Yiota: [laughs] Sure, we can each add a few. Once you go down to the state or local level, I think it's amazing the variety of approaches that people implement. It's community-driven as well as resource-driven quite honestly as well. But there are some states and cities that have created really what you might call a trafficking court. Judges that are really focusing on these issues are, again, very invested in diversionary programs and in safe harbor concepts as well.

That is a model that has been successful in some localities to really streamline the process so that you're not in front of a judge or with a prosecutor who may not be familiar with interviewing these victims, or in how to shield them in prosecutions and that sort of thing. I think that concept, it doesn't work everywhere, but I think in some cities where they've enacted those it's very promising. It shows a high level of education on the issue.

Cindy: I would go to the Orange County, California police department. They are pretty remarkable in what they're doing. Take a look at what they're doing, and it's a new program for them, relatively new and they're doing a bang-up job with it. That would be my suggestion. We have time for one more. Yes, sir.

Mark Lumpkins: Good evening, everyone. My name is Mark Lumpkins. I'm a student at Roosevelt State. I'm here with my teacher, Mr. Brown, and my classmate. My question is, how does human trafficking effect taxpayers?

Cindy: There's a whole lot of money that's not claimed, because this is all, for the most part, a cash-only business, with the exception of backpage and those like that. The money that is involved in human trafficking and the cartels that control human trafficking is astronomical.

These are moneys, like I mentioned earlier, that are going into the bad guys' pockets. They're not going into sustaining our roads, and buildings, and all this kind of stuff. It's going right in the bad guys' pockets.

From a tax standpoint, there's no taxes being paid on it, I assure you. I'm sure our government would like to get at it a little bit, which they should. Anything else?

Mark: Thank you, no. That's all I had to ask.

Cindy: Thanks for being here. Thank you for bringing your students. Oh, OK, sorry. I will say thank you to all of you before Kurt comes back up. We'll get organized here. But for all of you, I know there's a lot of you in the audience that participate in this issue daily. I want to thank you for that. We're only one voice, but boy, collectively we can get at this.

I want to thank you for your day-to-day work in this and all of the things that you endure to do this kind of work, and most of all for your dedication and devotion to it. You are giving a voice to the voiceless, and that's very important. Kurt, and thank you, Yiota, for coming. Thank you.

Yiota: Thank you for having me.

[applause]

Kurt: As you can tell, these are two very powerful, very determined, very informed advocates for stopping this practice, and I want to thank you for devoting your evening to this as well. Please, as you go out from here, do talk about it.

Do share what you've learned here or what you've heard about here. Look into it. It has to be a community-driven approach to change, and I think that's what we're hearing from Mrs. McCain, and Ms. Souras. Thank you again for coming, and please, join me again in thanking the two great speakers.

Cindy: Before you all leave, may I say this? The McCain Institute is not a think tank. We're a do tank. We're an action tank, so everything that we undertake has a purpose and

a way to get involved with it. That's what I encourage you to do. Obviously, we need our people to think and do these things for us, but we need to get active, more importantly, and that's where we rely on you. Thank you.

[applause]

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