

Rubio and Warren Join Forces Against Working Folks

In April, a year after its introduction in the US Senate by Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), the US House of Representatives passed the End Banking for Human Traffickers Act, “an act to increase the role of the financial industry in combating human trafficking.”

Of four quick and easy tests for bad legislation, the bill passes three:

First, it’s “bipartisan.” While many construe bipartisanship as a good thing, “the best of both worlds,” in practice the opposite is usually true. Each party gives the other the worst thing it wants — control of this or that piece of your life — in trade. In this case, no such trade is really required, because Rubio and Warren are aligned on both elements of the issue. Both of them want control of your genitalia and both of them want control of your bank account.

Secondly, it exploits moral panic to discourage scrutiny of its actual effects. In this case, the trending buzz word is “human trafficking.” In theory, that term means sexual enslavement of adults and/or sexual exploitation of children for profit. In practice, it always boils down to just another excuse for harassing adult sex workers trying to make a living and, contra all the “for the chilllllldren” posturing, taking food out of the mouths of THEIR children (if not taking away their children entirely).

Thirdly, it doesn’t even bother to hide the fact that it’s yet another attempt to conscript supposedly private sector actors into conducting (and reporting on) intrusive search-like activity that, if done directly by government employees in similar *en masse* fashion, might be held accountable to inconvenient standards like probable cause, warrants, etc.

The only test the bill fails is the “warm, fuzzy, and/or patriotic-sounding acronym” test. EBHTA? No CASH (Cute Acronym Skills Hero) bonus for the congressional staffer assigned to come up with that title.

The bad news is that if this bill passes the Senate and is signed into law, sex workers — already pushed to the economic margins in various ways by law enforcement, social stigma, and the poverty that often precedes the sex work career path — are going to have an even harder time opening or keeping checking or savings accounts at traditional banks, and therefore a harder time successfully applying for credit lines or home or car loans.

The good news is that the bill, whether it passes or not, will inevitably strengthen the counter-economy. Sex workers will turn to (or remain with) barter, cash, and cryptocurrency rather than trust what wealth they have with institutions subject to regulation by the likes of Warren and Rubio.

That eternal counter-economy serves workers, traders, and entrepreneurs as opposed to empowering politicians and their cronies. The Soviet Union ruthlessly attempted, and utterly failed, to suppress it for 70 years, even when at times it was the only thing standing between the Russian people and starvation.

Rubio and Warren and friends will fail too. Unfortunately, working people are the eggs they break in pursuit of an authoritarian omelet.