

God's Children Are Not For Sale

On July 4, 1776, our Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence, which states, *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."*

Liberty, or Freedom, has been cherished by Americans ever since. Our forebears shed their blood in many wars to gain or preserve our liberty, and to gain or restore the liberty of oppressed people in other nations.

Do Americans today value liberty as much as our forebears did? When we become aware of tyranny and oppression, will we be as resolved as they were to free the oppressed from tyranny?

Most Americans are unaware of a horrible injustice, oppression, and tyranny that exists throughout the world, especially right here in the United States -- the trafficking, enslavement, and sexual exploitation of children. Human trafficking is the second largest illicit industry in the U.S., second only to the drug trade. Sex trafficking is the most common type of trafficking in the U.S., as reported by 72% of detected survivors (ourrescue.org). Approximately 70 million Child Sexual Abuse Material files were estimated in 2019, with 78% of those files involving children under the age of 12 (thorn.org).

The United States is the world's leading consumer of child sexual exploitation, and Mexico is the world's leading supplier. Our border security and immigration policies, or lack thereof, are enabling the traffickers, and contributing to this great evil.

On April 26, 2023, Health and Human Services Whistleblower Tara Lee Rodas gave testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement. In 2021 Ms. Rodas was deployed to an emergency intake site in California to help the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) unite children with sponsors in the U.S. She testified, *"I thought I was going to help place children in loving homes. Instead, I discovered that children are being trafficked through a sophisticated network that begins with being recruited in home country, smuggled to the US border, and ends when ORR delivers a child to a Sponsor – some sponsors are criminals and traffickers and members of Transnational Criminal Organizations. Some sponsors view children as commodities and assets to be used for earning income. ...Whether intentional or not, it can be argued that the US Government has become the middleman in a large scale, multi-billion-dollar, child trafficking operation run by bad actors seeking to profit off the lives of children."* She testified that 85,000 children are missing, some are trafficked for labor or debt bondage, others are sold for sex.

This is not a partisan political issue. It is a moral issue. It is an issue that Left, Center, and Right, Democrats, Independents, and Republicans, can agree upon without hesitation. Any policy, or lack thereof, that allows children to be exploited and abused for profit is immoral and unacceptable. There is no excuse for allowing such policies to continue another single day.

What if one day your child, grandchild, niece, nephew, brother or sister disappeared without a trace? How would you feel? What would you do? This is the nightmare that millions of families throughout the world find themselves in. It is unacceptable and intolerable. We must put a stop to it.

Our government is aware of this problem, but it has not placed a high priority upon solving it. Increased public pressure is required, but public pressure can only come from public awareness. One very effective means of increasing public awareness is through the medium of motion pictures.

Sound of Freedom is a powerful new film made specifically for the purpose of opening the eyes of Americans to this horrific problem. It is being released in theaters across the nation on the week of July 4.

Sound of Freedom tells the true-life story of Department of Homeland Security agent Tim Ballard, played by actor Jim Caviezel (*The Passion of the Christ*). After freeing a young boy from traffickers, Ballard leaves the security of his DHS job in order to keep a promise he made to find and rescue the boy's sister, who has also been trafficked across international borders. The film takes the audience along on a dangerous undercover rescue operation into South America.

Today, Ballard continues his life's work through the organization he founded, Operation Underground Railroad, ourrescue.org, working cooperatively with law enforcement agencies throughout the world to rescue sex trafficked children.

Sound of Freedom is a professionally produced, Hollywood quality, edge-of-your-seat thriller. But it is more than just an entertaining film, it is meant to be a spark that ignites a movement, a movement committed to bringing an end to the evil of child sex trafficking. Will you join the movement to help free children from modern day slavery? Start by seeing *Sound of Freedom*!

Sound of Freedom is scheduled for showings July 3-13 at the AMC Classic 8 Theater in Ludington, and at the AMC Classic Cherry Blossom 14 Theater in Traverse City. After July 13, call the theaters to see if it's been held over, or look for an opportunity to stream the film through Angel Studios' website, angel.com/watch/sound-of-freedom.

Jeff Lawrence is a member of the Manistee County Republican party. He may be reached at jeffmanisteegop@gmail.com.