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Biden Commemorates Violence Against Women Act

Biden, women's groups observe 15th anniversary of Violence Against Women Act

By **CHRISTINE SIMMONS** Associated Press Writer

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON September 29, 2009 (AP)

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Women's groups gathered at Vice President Joe Biden's home Tuesday night to toast the 15th anniversary of landmark legislation aimed at eliminating violence against women.

"You've helped so many women step out of the darkness. You've helped so many young girls expect a different future, expect different treatment," Biden said as he commemorated the 1994 Violence Against Women Act. "This is a day to celebrate. We have so much to be proud of."

The National Women's Law Center, FaithTrust Institute, National Network to End Domestic Violence and American Association of University Women were among the groups invited to the vice president's residence, located on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory in northwest Washington.

Biden recalled how domestic violence was once regarded as a private matter. "It wasn't the business of the government. It's a family matter," he told about 100 guests. Advocates for women inspired a different attitude, he said.

The Violence Against Women Act, crafted by Biden while he served on the Senate Judiciary Committee as a senator from Delaware, led to more money for women's shelters and law-enforcement training.

Domestic violence rates fell sharply between 1993 and 2004. The Bureau of Justice Statistics said that "intimate partner violence" rates fell by more than 50 percent, which some experts attributed to key elements of the 1994 law.

Biden joined advocates from women's groups in saying that more needed to be done. "We cannot let this slip from the consciousness," he said.

Advocates are focusing on the International Violence Against Women Act, a separate piece of legislation, and reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act in 2011, said Juley Fulcher of the organization **Break the Cycle**.

Fulcher, a guest at the event, said there's more work to do to prevent dating violence and to provide services for teenagers who have experienced domestic and sexual violence. "There's definitely room for improvement," she said.

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Advocates worry that high unemployment may be contributing to domestic violence across the nation. The National Domestic Violence Hotline has received about 21,000 calls on average a month this year. Last year, the average was 19,500, said Retha Fielding, a spokeswoman for the hot line.

Fielding said she believes the number of calls has risen because of the recession as well as increased awareness of the hot line number. When someone in a household loses a job or a family loses a house, a woman could feel as if she has fewer choices if she wants to walk away from the violence, Fielding said.

"They're afraid to leave or they can't make plans to leave because the situation has changed," she said. "Most of these women have children they have to take care of."

When asked how the government is responding to domestic abuse tied to the recession, Lynn Rosenthal, White House domestic adviser on violence against women, said federal agencies are looking carefully at the problem.

"We're very aware of it," Rosenthal said.

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