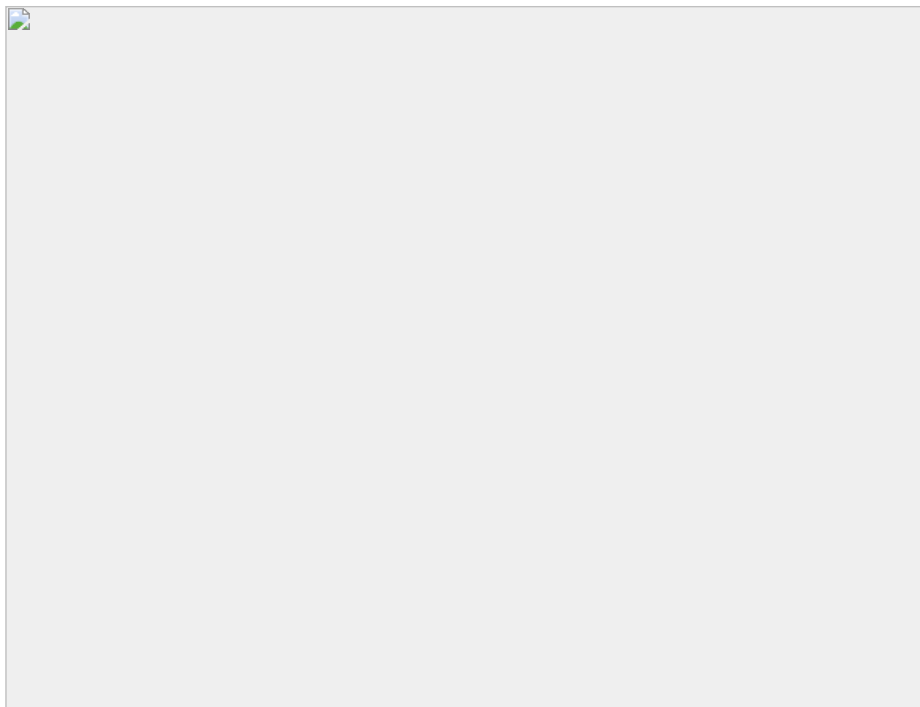


Sex Workers To Start Exposing Every Congressman in Washington DC

The classified ads site displays the message "backpage.com and affiliated websites have been seized."

 **Blake Montgomery**
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BuzzFeed News

Backpage.com, the popular classified ads website, went offline Friday after being seized and disabled by the federal government.

The Backpage.com notice stated that additional information would be provided on Friday at 6 p.m. ET, but later in the evening a Justice Department spokesperson said in a statement, "The Court has ruled that the case remains sealed and we have nothing to report today." The statement indicates there is a court case related to the Backpage.com matter, but no other information about it is public.

Visitors to backpage.com and backpage.ca were met with a message that stated, "backpage.com and affiliated websites have been seized as part of an enforcement action by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division."

The site — known for personal adult ads — was the dominant online hub for sex workers to advertise their services.

The Department of Justice confirmed the message's legitimacy, but did not comment further. Backpage did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The FBI's Phoenix branch raided the home of Backpage founder Michael Lacey Friday morning, according to local station [3TV/CBS 5](#). A spokesman for the field office, Glenn Milnor, would only confirm to BuzzFeed News that "law enforcement activity is occurring."

Lacey's attorney, Larry Kazan, told [AZ Central](#) that Lacey had been indicted by a federal grand jury. However, Kazan said he had not been able to review the charges because the 93-count indictment remained sealed.

Kazan did not immediately respond to request for comment.

A judge dismissed pimping charges against Lacey, former owner James Larkin, and Backpage CEO Carl Ferrer in 2016.

Meanwhile, people who said they had placed ads on Backpage complained that they were not issued refunds or notified of a shutdown.

Miss Marla Moon, a sex worker who specializes in domination, told BuzzFeed News she lost \$50 when Backpage went down Friday and that, for the past two years, she had spent \$50 on Backpage ads nearly every day. She said it's not the first time the site has closed its services without warning and failed to issue refunds.

In early 2017, Backpage [shuttered its adult ads section](#), a popular marketplace for sex workers, and Moon said people who had paid for ads in advance were not refunded. The company stopped displaying adult ads in advance of a Senate hearing on whether the site knowingly facilitated child sex trafficking.

Miss Marla Moon  

@MissMarlaMoon

So how much money do you think [#backpage](#) just stole from us? Thank you for getting rich off of us then kicking us while we're down by changing the way we pay for ads, and pocketing our current balance. [#fuckyoubp](#)

8:27 AM - Apr 6, 2018

 61  42 people are talking about this 

VictoriaJolie  

@Victoriajolie

So I reload by bitcoin my account on backpage ..they took it but I'm not able to post [#backpage](#)

6:47 AM - Apr 6, 2018

 8  See VictoriaJolie's other Tweets 

The notice on Backpage's homepage lists the Texas Attorney General's office as a participating agency. Sex worker Christi Long, 28, told BuzzFeed News she had been arrested at a hotel south of Austin in a

sting operation and interrogated about Backpage the night before the site was taken down. Police had responded to an ad she posted on the site, she said.

"They asked me 'Do you believe that Backpage is used for sex trafficking?'" Long said. "I told them sex workers use it. I said it was better they find victims of sex trafficking on Backpage than dead in a ditch, which is where they'll find them now that it's gone."

"They responded, 'Then Backpage needs to be taken down. We will always be there to find them,'" Long said.

Long, who is transgender, said that trans sex workers will also suffer because of Backpage's demise. She's been advertising on Backpage for the past ten years, she said.

"This is the only way that I've ever been able to have any sort of sustainability. I have a house now. I have a car. I'm able to eat regularly," Long said. "I thought I would always have this, but I don't any more. I'm not sure how I'm going to get out of this situation at this moment. It's terrifying."

The Texas Attorney General's office did not immediately respond to request for comment.

Backpage has been under increasing scrutiny over its personal ads. In 2015, major credit card companies [stopped processing payments](#) for the site amid allegations from authorities that it was facilitating sex trafficking and prostitution.

Some people said they did not see the seizure message despite links to the site not working, likely because the site's servers had yet to update.

Craigslist recently took down its personal ads section in response to the Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act, known as SESTA, [saying](#) it could open the company up to "criminal and civil liability when third parties (users) misuse online personals unlawfully," and that it "can't take such risk without jeopardizing all our other services."

SESTA aims to halt sex trafficking, particularly of children, by restricting what kind of information can be posted on websites like Backpage, where people often advertise sexual services. Critics say it endangers sex workers and may impinge on free speech online.

Zoe Tillman and Chris Geidner contributed to this report.

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