

EDITORIAL OPINION

Human trafficking a fast-growing scourge

LINDA OBERHAUS

Battered and bruised, Lana was 18 years old when she was brought from the hospital to The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

At 16, she had fled a broken home with plans for a new life with a man she thought was her boyfriend. Three years later, her life was a nightmare of abuse and violence, having been sold for sex on a website called Backpage.

Lana is an American-born citizen. She could be the daughter of your friend or neighbor. She is one of 38 human trafficking victims served by the shelter in just the past two years.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month. As you read this commentary, it is important to note that human trafficking is the fastest-growing and third-largest organized criminal activity in the world, just behind the drug and arms trades. Florida ranks third in the nation for calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Sex trafficking, in particular, is a lucrative industry. In a 2014 report, the Urban Institute estimated that the

underground sex economy ranged from \$39.9 million in Denver to \$290 million in Atlanta.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, a trafficker can make up to \$150,000 to \$200,000 per person each year and the average trafficker has four to six girls.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, the Collier County Sheriff's Office Human Trafficking Unit employs a full-time detective and victim advocate. This unit leads the region in the number of human trafficking investigations and arrests.

During Tuesday's Human Trafficking Awareness proclamation in the Collier County Commission chambers, Commissioner Donna Fiala stated that during the Florida Association of Counties' legislative conference, the Sheriff's Office was recognized as "lead in the state" for its work to stop human trafficking.

Community awareness plays a vital role in the fight against human trafficking. We live in a perceived paradise, but sex trafficking can happen to anyone, anywhere and in any situation. Traffickers target vulnerable victims such as runaways, victims of abuse/neglect and those suffering from mental illness, traumatic life events or

drug addiction.

Victims are often coerced with false promises of jobs, or through feigned romantic relationships such as Lana's. Once their victim is caught in the trap, traffickers use a variety of mental and physical manipulations including threats, intimidation, violence and drugs to maintain control.

Survivors of sex trafficking endure an unspeakable amount of pain and trauma. In addition to serious physical and emotional injury, trafficking victims suffer serious mental health issues, which frequently present themselves after the more immediate needs, such as safety and shelter, have been met. Victims may also face legal battles for crimes they were forced to commit by their traffickers. These criminal records haunt them for the rest of their lives.

The Shelter for Abused Women & Children is committed to providing safe shelter and the long-term therapeutic care that victims of human trafficking need to re-establish normalcy in their lives. In November, plans were announced for the Shelly Stayer Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking & Domestic Violence. Slated to be built on 5 acres in Immokalee, this \$5.5 million emergency

shelter will be uniquely designed with a wing to serve survivors of domestic violence and a wing to assist victims of human trafficking.

Unfortunately, few victims of human trafficking ever come forward. They are invisible victims of unspeakable crimes and it is up to each of us to learn to recognize the signs of human trafficking and report anything suspicious.

Please go to naplesshelter.org/trafficking for more information on how you can help identify human trafficking and become part of the solution.

Oberhaus, of Naples, is executive director of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children. If you know or suspect that someone is a victim of human trafficking or domestic violence, call the shelter's 24-hour crisis hotline at 239-775-1101.

Coming up

Monday: Children are vulnerable to becoming trafficking victims, two professors write.

Tuesday: Women's Foundation seeking data on human trafficking.

Today in history

Today is Sunday, Jan. 15, the 15th day of 2017. There are 350 days left in the year.

On this date in:

1559: England's Queen Elizabeth I was crowned in Westminster Abbey.

1777: The people of New Connecticut declared their independence. (The republic later became the state of Vermont.)

1929: Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta.

2009: US Airways Capt. Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger ditched his Airbus 320 in the Hudson River after a flock of birds disabled both engines; all 155 people aboard survived.



Then & now

Recognize the Naples site marked by the arrow? If you think you know what's there now, go to www.naplesnews.com, click the "business" tab and then the quick link "breaking ground" to enter your answer. We'll print the answer here next week.

Dec. 25 answer: Ramada Inn, 1100 U.S. 41 N.

Dec. 25 winner: Robert Nadeau

FILE PHOTO

Today's birthdays

Actress Margaret O'Brien ("Meet Me In St. Louis") is 79. Actress Andrea Martin is 70. Actor-director Mario Van Peebles is 60. Guitarist Adam Jones of Tool is 52.

Actor James Nesbitt ("Waking Ned Devine") is 52. Singer Lisa Lisa of Lisa Lisa and the Cult Jam is 50. Actor Chad Lowe is 49. Actress Regina King is 46. Actor Eddie Cahill ("CSI: New York") is 39. Rapper Pitbull is 36. Actor Victor Rasuk ("Fifty Shades of Grey") is 32. Actress Jessie Schram ("Nashville," "Once Upon A Time") is 31. Electronic musician Skrillex is 29.

Today's quote

"There's another reason why you should love your enemies, and that is because hate distorts the personality of the hater."

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Bible quote

But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it. — Luke 11:28

Letters

Live with this

The lack of rational thought displayed in the letters on these pages boggles the mind. I won't mention names, as you know who you are, to who I say, "Get over it."

Getting over the victory of the most vile and inexperienced candidate (Donald Trump) ever to run for our highest office is easy for the losing side as they will get to see their adversaries go down in flames. The winners are the ones who will have to live with it. Sooner or later their conscience will click in.

Think about why Russian President Vladimir Putin swayed the election in his favor? Megalomaniacs like each other's philosophy. Dictators fast become best friends. Check out history. They listen to no one else and love to deny reality. The two will make a great pair of equals who hope to share in the spoils, like family business in the White House and all that. There was a reason for not telling the American people where his wealth is.

Putin is already one of the richest men in the world and his partner wishes to join him in that club.

The most amazing thing is that after President-elect Trump has been shown by every fact-checker in the business to have been deceptive on just about everything he has said 70 to 75 percent of the time, his supporters still believe him. Now that every promise he has made has already been broken, they claim he has a plan or many plans.

I wish someone would actually state the how of any such plan. To make America great again is not a plan. It is typical baloney. You've been scammed. Live with it already.

W. Fred Rump, Naples

What happened to presidential honeymoon?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

WASHINGTON — The shortest honeymoon on record is officially over. Normally, newly elected presidents enjoy a wave of goodwill that allows them to fly high at least through their first 100

days. Donald Trump has not yet been sworn in and the honeymoon has already come and gone.

Presidents-elect usually lie low during the interregnum. Trump never lies low. He seized the actual presidency from Barack Obama within weeks of his election — cutting ostentatious deals with U.S. manufacturers to keep jobs at home, challenging 40-year-old China policy, getting into a very public fight with the intelligence agencies. By now he has taken over the presidential stage. It is true that we have only one president at a time, and for over a month it's been Donald Trump.

The result is quantifiable. A Quinnipiac poll from Nov. 17-20 — the quiet, hope-and-change phase — showed a decided bump in Trump's popularity and in general national optimism. It didn't last long. In the latest Quinnipiac poll, the numbers have essentially returned to Trump's (historically dismal) pre-election levels.

For several reasons. First, the refusal of an unbending left to accept the legitimacy of Trump's victory. It's not just the demonstrators chanting "not my president." It is leading Democrats pushing one line after another to delegitimize the election, as in: he lost the popular vote, it's James Comey's fault, the Russians did it.

Second, Trump's own instincts and inclinations, a thirst for attention that leads to hyperactivity. His need to dominate every news cycle feeds an almost compulsive tweet habit. It has placed him just about continuously at the center of the national conversation and not always to his benefit.

Trump simply can't resist playground pushback. His tweets gave Meryl Streep's Golden Globes speech priceless publicity. His mocking Arnold Schwarzenegger for bad "Apprentice" ratings — compared with "the ratings machine, DJT" — made Trump look small and Schwarzenegger (almost) sympathetic.

Nor is this behavior likely to change after the inauguration. It's part of Trump's character. Nothing negative goes unanswered because, for Trump, an unanswered slight has the air of concession or surrender.

Finally, it's his chronic indiscretion, his jumping from one subject to another without rhyme, reason or larger strategy. In a week packed with confirmation hearings and Russian hacking allegations, what was he doing meeting with Robert Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine activist pushing the thoroughly discredited idea that vaccines cause autism?

We know from way back during the Republican debates that Trump himself has dabbled in this dubious territory. One could, however, write it off as one of many campaign oddities that would surely fade away. Not so, apparently.

This is not good. The idea that vaccines cause autism originally arose in a 1998 paper in the medical journal *The Lancet* that was later found to be fraudulent and had to be retracted. Indeed, the lead researcher

acted so egregiously that he was stripped of his medical license.

Kennedy says that Trump asked him to chair a commission about vaccine safety. While denying that, the transition team does say the commission idea remains open. Either way, the damage is done. The anti-vaccine fanatics seek any validation. This indirect endorsement from Trump is immensely harmful. Vaccination has prevented more childhood suffering and death than any other measure in history. With so many issues pressing, why even go there?

The vaccination issue was merely an exclamation point on the scatter-brained randomness of the Trump transition. All of which contributes to the harried, almost wearying feeling that we are already well into the Trump presidency.

Compare this to eight years ago and the near euphoria — overblown but nonetheless palpable — at the swearing-in of Barack Obama. Not since JFK had any new president enjoyed such genuine goodwill upon accession to office.

And yet it turns out that such auspicious beginnings are not at all predictive. We could see it this same week. Tuesday night, there stood Obama giving a farewell address that only underscored the failure of a presidency so bathed in optimism at its start. The final speech could have been given, nearly unedited, in 2008. It even ended with "yes we can."

Is there more powerful evidence of the emptiness of the intervening two terms? When your final statement is a reprise of your first, you have confessed to being nothing more than a historical parenthesis.

— Washington Post Writers Group