

# Advocate: U.S. close to ending domestic violence epidemic

By Aisling Swift

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The nation's top domestic violence advocate said Thursday we're close to ending a national epidemic that has spilled into the streets and workplace, but that everyone must join the battle and turn the mirror on themselves.

"I believe we are on the verge of ending this violence," Lynn Rosenthal, director of external affairs for the National Domestic Violence Hotline, told about 700 people gathered at the Mending Broken Hearts with Hope luncheon, a fundraiser for the Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Naples.

"We're healing families one step at a time," Rosenthal said. "That's our task, and we can do it."

The fundraiser, at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort in North Naples, will continue until 5 p.m. Friday, with boutiques of clothing, jewelry, toys and other items that are for sale to the public in an effort to raise money for the shelter. The shelter has served 68,393 women, children and pets in 26 years.

Rosenthal served as the White House Advisor on Violence Against Women, executive director and president of the National Network to End Domestic Violence, senior adviser to Vice President Joe Biden and on the

White House Council on Women and Girls. Earlier, she headed a Florida domestic violence shelter and led state domestic violence coalitions.

In the White House, she worked to reduce domestic violence homicides, workplace domestic violence, improved response to sexual violence and raised awareness about the effects on youth. This week, she was at the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women in New York, where she heard stories about women beaten and killed over dowries or gang raped on buses.

"We say, 'How barbaric, how barbaric,'" she said. "But I believe we have to turn

the mirror on ourselves."

She spoke just days after Collier County sheriff's deputies arrested 15 people in the state's largest human trafficking case in which women were brought here and forced into prostitution for \$25. She noted more than 18 million women nationwide are rape victims and 1 million are raped every year.

"What's most shocking about this violence is our youth bear the brunt of it," she said, calling the effects long lasting for women and children, who witness the violence, hide and protect siblings, lose sleep and have to call 911 — releasing stress hormones that affect brain development and the immune system.

Earlier, Linda Oberhaus, the shelter's director, said the shelter laid the groundwork that led to significant changes in the community's response to domestic violence.

Christy Carpenter, a shelter board member who took her children "out to dinner" and fled her abusive husband years ago, said afterward that women should speak to a counselor and formulate an escape plan.

"The perception is that victims of domestic violence are weak, but that's because their power has been taken away," Carpenter said, calling them the strongest women. "The shelter gives them back the power that they've had all along."

## TESTS from 5A

some educators said it doesn't address all of their concerns.

Andy Ford, president of the Florida Education Association, said the process shows the House listened to constituents and educators. He said the Education Association appreciates the flexibility but still is concerned about the "overall amount of time that testing will require."

The Senate bill would:   
 ■ limit the amount of time for test administration to no more than 5 percent of total school hours per student, per year;

■ reduce the number of tests.

The House bill would give districts flexibility in choosing a date to start the school year. Districts could start school as early as Aug. 10.

Currently, the school start date may be no earlier than 14 days before Labor Day, except for academically high-performing districts.

The Senate proposal does not address school start dates.

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## Collier County | State exams

# Students who opt out must sit, stare

By Melhor Marie Leonor  
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Despite parent complaints that their children were forced to sit quietly for two hours in classrooms during testing after they refused the state-mandated exams, the Collier County school district says children "opting out" will continue to sit and stare for the sake of those taking the test.

Superintendent Kamela Patton said the district decided not to allow students who refuse to answer questions on state-mandated exams to bring books.

"A book is a distraction to a kid who is taking the exam," Patton said. "It throws them off because they think they have to hurry up and finish their tests."

District spokesman Greg Turchetta said most schools are not allowing students who "opt out" to sit in another room while their classmates take the test. Schools just don't have the additional staff, he said.

In a district administering 30,000 exams, only seven Collier students have been identified as having "opted out."

“A book is a distraction to a kid who is taking the exam.”

Kamela Patton, Collier County Schools superintendent

In Florida, the testing boycott was largely drowned out by the testing tech meltdown. Students throughout the state effectively refused to participate in state-mandated tests by breaking the seal on their exam books and not answering any questions.

Parents and leaders concerned about student testing argue students who "opt out" of taking the test will not be negatively impacted on their way to graduation. The state has refused to acknowledge the practice as an option for parents and students.

The parents of four of the seven Collier children who refused to answer questions during the first window of state testing, which ends Friday, told district officials to reconsider and let their children read.

"We understand that [this] is within our rights," said Jocelyne Sturdivent, who took the podium next to her daughter after midnight at this week's school board meeting. "I would

not punish my child by making her sit and stare at a wall for two hours."

Her daughter, Lily, said that during her testing session, she did little more than shift in her seat.

"I was not allowed to read a book," she said. "My teacher was forced to make me sit there."

With little guidance from the state, school districts are handling the situation in different ways. In Lee, Superintendent Nancy Graham said students would be allowed to take out books and read quietly. In other districts, students who refuse to answer questions are quietly walked out of the testing site.

Patton said the district will go back and explore its options, but reminded parents to "think about the other side."

The next round of tests begins March 23, when third and fourth graders will take the Florida Standards Assessment in English Language Arts and Math.

## CARSON from 5A

as a conservative commentator for Fox News before the network cut those ties.

Carson had aired a 40-minute infomercial "A Breath of Fresh Air: A New Prescription for America" in support of the nascent presidential campaign he insists does not exist. He also has hired a finance director and other key staffers.

### 'I'M NOT POLITICALLY CORRECT'

"The first thing I should tell you is, I'm not politically correct," he said to the group at the Hilton.

"I believe that political correctness is on the verge of destroying our nation."

### 'EDUCATION IS KEY'

"Education is key," he told the capacity crowd of about 450.

"In this country, we spend the first 20 years or so either preparing ourselves, or not preparing ourselves," Carson said.

"If we prepare ourselves, we have about 55 years to reap the benefits. If we don't, we have 55 years to suffer the consequences."

### BE BRAVE

"The next time you hear the national anthem, recognize: You cannot be free if you are not brave," Carson said. He received a standing ovation.

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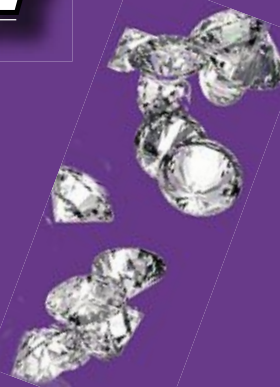
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