DECEMBER 13 - 17, 2009

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA

A NEW SLAVERY

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2009

KANSAS CITY EDITION WWW.KANSASCITY.COM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2009

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A NEW SLAVERY

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Go to KansasCity.com for a photo gallery showing scenes from the borders and a video preview of the full series that includes interviews with the reporters.

THE FIRST OF A FIVE-PART SERIES

MONDAY: International sex trafficking is more complex and problematic than the U.S. law designed to combat it. Meanwhile, domestic victims are getting scant attention.

| TUESDAY: America's intricate, fraud-plagued work visa program is a welcome mat for modern-day slavers.

| WEDNESDAY: Some suspected victims, in violation of U.S. policy, are being deported on government-run jets has based in Kansas City.

| THURSDAY: A new approach is needed, and changes are coming

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART ONE

Beginning a descent into despair

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." — 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified Dec. 6, 1865

By MIKE HOSKINS and LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

Sebastian Pereria told a friend last year about his life in America.

How he wanted to see his wife and children in India, but his boss kept his identification papers and wouldn't let him go.

Other waiters who worked with him at a Topeka restaurant told of how they were forced to work 13-hour days, six days a week. They talked of how the boss underpaid them and pocketed their tips.

In the end, Pereria, 46, got his wish. He finally arrived home last year.

In a coffin.

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But an investigation by The Kansas City Star found that, in spite of all the rhetoric from the Bush and Obama administrations, the United States is failing to find and help tens of thousands of human trafficking victims in America.

The Star also found that the government is doing little to stop the flow of trafficking along the porous U.S.-Mexico border and that when victims are identified, many are denied assistance.

The United States also has violated its own policies by deporting countless victims who should be offered sanctu-

The point where a perilous journey begins

MISSOURI: Midwest becomes hub of human trafficking

POLICE: Trafficking crimes don't rate a high priority

COMING TO AMERICA

PLIGHT: With guns and threats, traffickers demand $3,000

Victims...or co-conspirators?

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | U.S. system to find, help victims is broken

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The United States also has violated its own policies by deporting countless victims who should be offered sanctuary, but sometimes end up back in the hands of traffickers.

After spending millions of taxpayer dollars, America appears to be losing the war in its own backyard.

Even some top federal anti-trafficking authorities in the Bush and Obama administrations acknowledged serious problems.

"The current system is not yet picking up all the victims of human trafficking crimes," Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, told The Star two weeks ago. "It has been a growing problem and in a world of growing problems, it's time for the nations of the world to take it on."

America's failure to live up to its own high standards isn't for lack of will or good intentions or even money. The Star's investigation pointed to problems that are more systemic: an uncoordinated, inconsistent approach to finding victims; politically charged arguments over how to define trafficking; and a continuing disbelief among some in local law enforcement that it even exists.

The issue is further complicated by the heated debate over illegal immigration. The willing participation initially of some victims is blurring the lines and testing the law.

"People feel if you come in illegally, anything that happens to you is your fault," said Lisette Arsuaga, with the Los Angeles-based Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking. "Slavery is not an immigration issue. It's a civil rights issue. There's no justification for making someone a slave."

It may be hard to imagine that slavery exists in America, but trafficking victims are all around us. The Midwest, in particular, seems to be an emerging hub.

Although trafficking usually is considered a coastal phenomenon, more alleged traffickers — 36 in the past three years — have been prosecuted by federal authorities in western Missouri than anywhere in the nation.

One Kansas City case, involving Giant Labor Solutions, is believed to be the largest labor trafficking ring uncovered in U.S. history.

Around the country, some victims exemplify the more exotic definitions of trafficking — those sold into the sex trade or into forced labor. But many, like Pereria, find themselves in mundane jobs. Incurring heavy debts while trying to find a better life, they become financially chained to their traffickers and work for low pay or in dangerous conditions.

They toil in factories and massage parlors, on fruit and vegetable farms, and inside homes, hotels and restaurants from California to Maine. Stripped of their humanity, they're often threatened with their lives, or their families' lives, if they don't submit to the traffickers' demands.

The victims are not unlike Dareyam, a 42-year-old Indonesian woman held captive for 18 years, half of those in the United States.

Kept as a housekeeper on the West Coast, she was forced to clean house naked and to sleep on the floor. She could not use the indoor bathroom, forced to go in a plastic bag outside.

"My lady, she was mean, evil, crazy, you know," Dareyam told The Star.

Another Indonesian woman, Ima, 29, worked long hours caring for two children, cleaning a home on the West Coast and never making a dime. Verbally abusive, the woman who enslaved her once hit Ima so hard she needed stitches.

After three years, she wrote a note to a housekeeper next door. *Please help me, I can't take it anymore.* It took Ima hours to find the courage to write those eight words.

The physical and psychological toll on trafficking victims can trap them in a life of slavery for years.

"I trusted nobody," said Flor, a 37-year-old survivor living in California, who came to the United States to earn money to start a sewing business.

She'd already lost one child to starvation in Mexico. She swore none of her children would go hungry again. "But when I got here, everything went wrong," Flor said.

Her boss started abusing her, forcing Flor, who was in the United States illegally, to work 17 to 19 hours a day for no pay. After other workers went home, she labored through the night, toiling under a dim sewing machine bulb no bigger than a matchbook.

"I thought slaves were only in the past, just in history," Flor said. "It happens every day."

She still can't forget the words of her trafficker, a woman who told her she could kill her and no one would care. "If I kill a dog, I will get in trouble," Flor's trafficker told her. "If I kill you, I won't get in any trouble. No one knows you are here. You don't exist."

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Considered by some the most dangerous point of entry into the United States, Tijuana routinely sees 24 lanes filled with cars seeking to cross the border from Mexico.

Finding victims

Six months after President Barack Obama was sworn in, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton declared human trafficking a top foreign policy priority. "Trafficking is a crime that involves every nation on earth and that includes our own," Clinton said in June as she presented the U.S. government's ninth annual global report on human trafficking.

But so far, little progress has been made in changing ineffective policies, The Star found.

Obama's incoming anti-trafficking czar, former federal prosecutor Luis CdeBaca, said many obstacles remain, including a lack of money, coordination and training. "We are doing a lot ... but continue to have a lot of learning to do," CdeBaca said.

America's human trafficking law requires the government to rate other nations every year and report on their efforts to rescue victims and punish traffickers.

In the best category: most of Europe and a few other countries. In the worst: North Korea, Malaysia and 15 other nations whose human trafficking records the United States finds unacceptable.

One country the State Department has never rated: the United States itself.

"That has been a criticism of the report from the outset ... countries around the world just hate this report," said Sen. Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican who co-sponsored the original anti-trafficking legislation in 2000.

He added that it may be time for congressional oversight hearings on America's anti-trafficking efforts.

State Department officials have promised to rate the United States against other countries in their next report in June 2010. While the assumption is that America will be in the top category, some experts aren't so sure.

"It's not a slam dunk," said Mark Lagon, the Bush administration's human trafficking czar. "Too many people in government are not recognizing victims as victims," added Lagon, who now heads the Polaris Project, a nonprofit anti-trafficking group.

Lagon and other experts say America first needs to do a better job of determining how many victims there are in the United States, and then try

harder to find them.

Even officials with the Justice Department-funded Human Trafficking Reporting System acknowledge the shortcomings. "We are just not as good as we should be at being able to identify victims of trafficking," said Amy Farrell, who helps run the reporting system.

In fact, the government estimates that since 2002, up to 140,000 trafficking victims have been brought into the United States. But only 1 percent of them, about 1,600 people, ended up with visas meant for trafficking victims, The Star found.

The reasons for such low numbers are unclear. Many victims are afraid to come forward. Others just want to go home. Some do not cooperate with law enforcement and are deported.

But even if the U.S. had rescued all of them, congressional limits on so-called "T-visas" would have allowed only 40,000 people to get them.

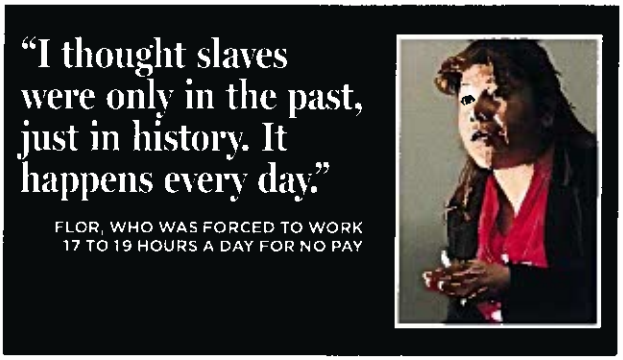
"It's like the devil is running roughshod over these people who have already suffered so much," said Kent Felty, a Colorado attorney who has represented scores of suspected trafficking victims. "We shouldn't be doing this to these victims."

The Star found an unworkable bureaucracy also is partly to blame. The federal government's vast anti-human trafficking network suffers from turf wars and a lack of coordination.

In all, seven Cabinet-level departments are involved: Homeland Security and the State Department, the Justice Department, Health and Human Services, Defense and the departments of Education and Labor.

The enforcement effort is so widely dispersed that in 2003 officials set up the Senior Policy Operating Group to coordinate the coordination.

Federal watchdogs found it isn't working. A Government Accountability Office audit in 2006 noted that disagreements among the various agencies have hurt America's anti-trafficking activities at home and abroad.



KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

"Please help me, I can't take it anymore" — the written plea from Ima, abused for years on the West Coast.

All this is costing millions. Even the Congressional Research Service couldn't figure out exactly how much has been spent, concluding it was impossible.

A new report, however, found $23 million spent on domestic programs alone in fiscal 2008.

What's more, federally funded human trafficking task forces are clustered in coastal areas, leaving huge swaths of the country ill-equipped to find victims.

Audits found some agencies misused federal grant money or claimed victims who didn't qualify. Others spent the money, but found few if any victims.

Determining the effectiveness of the task forces is impossible, too. That's because the Justice Department is prohibited from releasing task force-level data without their consent, said Duren Banks, chief of the department's Prosecution and Adjudication Statistics Unit.

However, an audit by the Justice Department's inspector general concluded they're not working very well.

"Human trafficking grant programs have built significant capacities to serve victims," noted last year's audit. "But (they) have not been effective at identifying and serving significant numbers of alien trafficking victims."

During raids at poultry plants or factories, immigration agents often don't screen for human trafficking. The immigration enforcement agency also doesn't screen every immigrant it finds, trafficking experts said.

"Our biggest problem is the screening," says Florrie Burke, a longtime advocate against human trafficking.

Border failures

Even along the U.S. border with Mexico, little is being done to screen for victims being trafficked into the United States.

"The only question they (border agents) ask is, 'Do you have your documents?'." said Mary Galvin, a social worker in Tijuana, speaking through a translator as she sat in the front room of the women's shelter where she works.

"That's all they care about. They don't do screening, sit down with people and ask, 'What are you doing here? Who brought you in?' ... They don't investigate. They don't care."

But even when the Border Patrol catches illegal immigrants, agents often fail to recognize human trafficking victims. Consider a 21-year-old woman snatched off the street outside her school in Mexico. Rocio Gonzalez Watson, a victim's advocate, tells the woman's story.

How the words of her kidnappers echoed in the young woman's mind as she moved through a long line of immigrants near the border. *Don't say anything, or we'll kill you and your family.*

She was smack in the middle of the busiest and what some consider the most dangerous point of entry into the United States, just north of Tijuana.

Traffickers herded her and 11 other females through the port like cattle. The people who kidnapped her, the ones who gave her phony identification papers and who planned to sell her once she was inside America, were just feet away. Watching. *Don't say anything.*

A U.S. border agent thought the young woman was trying to smuggle herself into the country, and she ended up back in the hands of her kidnappers.

"She was face to face with the agent, but he didn't ask her anything. Even when he was with her, away from the kidnappers, he didn't ask her more questions," Watson said.

Denied at the border, the young kidnapping victim was taken to a "load house" where the other girls waited. They put the 12 of them across the bottom of a filthy motorboat and headed to a landing spot in southern California.

Once there, the young woman from Mexico could hear the traffickers assaulting some of the other girls and barking orders. *Keep your head down. Put your heads down on the floor.*

She could hear other women being bought and sold.

I want her, someone would say. I want her.

Ten were sold. But not the young woman. They took her to a rough neighborhood, dropped her off, and told her she would die there.

A good Samaritan finally saved her.

If agents had asked more questions at the border, identified her as a human trafficking victim, she wouldn't have had to go through so much trauma in the United States, advocates said. Her story is an "eye opener," Watson said, showing how victims go undetected and unassisted.

She hopes it also shows the need to educate victims that it's all right to trust law enforcement and there are laws against this kind of abuse — even for those who are not U.S. citizens.

"If they (victims) understand the authorities are there to protect them, that they have rights, 99 percent of the time they will be willing to cooperate," Watson said. "But when victims are treated like criminals, when authorities act exactly how the traffickers say the authorities will act, we all lose."

No one knows how many girls and women like her, scared and silent, cross the border each year. Or how many come over thinking they will be getting legitimate jobs, then are victimized once they are here.

But there's only so much agents can do when the abuse hasn't happened yet, said Christopher Dombek, who directs the Office of Alien Smuggling Interdiction for U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"At the time they are coming in, they probably don't consider themselves victims," Dombek said. "I don't think people coming to the United States think they're going to be victimized."

Dombek said preventing and detecting trafficking is a priority for his agency.

Yet advocates contend border agents could do more to spot patterns, such as packs of young women coming into the United States with promises of legitimate jobs who later are sexually exploited. Often they're turned loose on the streets, or forced to work in massage parlors as prostitutes, like one young Asian woman.

A college student in her homeland, she was lured by traffickers to America with hopes of a bartending job making $200 to $300 a night. At first she worked on the West Coast, forced to drink whiskey with wealthy patrons and provide sexual favors. Next stop, a massage parlor in the South.

The first two days she did nothing but cry.

"After that, you're no longer a human being," said the 32-year-old who agreed to speak with The Star if her name wasn't published. "You feel like an animal."

Finding justice

While federal anti-trafficking laws provide stiff penalties — and the number of prosecutions is increasing — the chances of being charged or convicted as a trafficker remain low, The Star found.

The United States convicted fewer traffickers per capita in 2006 than most of the countries deemed by the State Department to do the best job of fighting trafficking, according to a study by Alese Wooditch, a human trafficking expert and researcher at George Mason University.

To be sure, prosecutors are reluctant to file charges they don't think they can make stick.

But contributing to the problem, experts said, is a lack of consistency among prosecutors as to the meaning of coercion, which is required under federal law. Some prosecutors also tend to "cherry pick" the best cases and pass over victims who might not do well on the stand.

"The definition of human trafficking in the federal code is for severe trafficking where there is physical abuse, or branding, of the victim," explained Lt. Derek Marsh of the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force in California. "So when we bring a case without those elements, they are less likely to prosecute."

In one case last year, a Utah Legal Services attorney acquired special trafficking visas for more than 60 Thai laborers who went unpaid for work they performed on pig farms in Utah and Colorado.

Many had mortgaged property in Thailand to pay fees to get into the United States. Some lost their homes when they were unable to make the payments, said attorney Alex McBean. Federal prosecutors investigated but never filed charges against the alleged trafficker.

"The questions they asked tended to be focused on physical abuse or a threat of physical abuse," McBean said, noting abuse can take other forms as well.

Across America, many local police and sheriff's departments tend to ignore human trafficking.

Homicide and burglary, assault and larceny remain high on their "to do" lists, but not trafficking.

"I don't think much is being done to root it out," said Ron Soodalter, who wrote "The Slave Next Door," a new book on human trafficking, with Kevin Bales. "There's the idea that if I stumble across it, hopefully I will know it when I see it."

More than 70 percent of local and state law enforcement agencies surveyed by Northeastern University recently said that human trafficking was a rare or nonexistent problem in their communities. Only one in five agencies had received some type of human trafficking training.

In addition, some officers are reluctant to intervene in sex and labor trafficking cases because they believe the victims likely were complicit in their own victimization.

The young college woman from Asia — forced to have sex with 10 to 12 men a day — finally escaped. But only after paying someone $1,200 in "tip money" to help her contact authorities.

She sought shelter with an anti-trafficking agency but it took four months to get a work permit. Though she finally got a T-visa, allowing her to remain in the United States for four years, she must wait to apply for permanent residency.

"The U.S. process is too long," she said. "All I want is to be normal. I want to forget."

She still has nightmares. She still sees the face of the man who enslaved her. Still threatening her, cutting her. Still inflicting pain. She doesn't like to talk about what she went

PROTECTING THE VICTIMS

In researching the series, Kansas City Star reporters conducted hundreds of interviews with human trafficking experts, government officials, prosecutors and law enforcement officers across the United States.

They sought out survivors of modern-day slavery, many of whom were reluctant to discuss their experiences. In every case, the newspaper followed ground rules suggested by anti-trafficking advocates in an effort to avoid re-traumatizing them.

In some cases, the newspaper withheld the names of survivors, or showed only a portion of their faces in photographs, in order to protect them from violent traffickers, some of whom remain at large. Some survivors, however, didn't object to having their photos published as long as their full names weren't disclosed.

Scenes in the Hostage House stories were based on extensive interviews with those involved in the trafficking case.

through.

She refuses to tell her husband and her mother what happened.

"It was horrible," is all she can say.

She won't know for two years whether she'll be granted permanent residency in the United States. Like so many survivors, she remains imprisoned by uncertainty.

"I can't be happy 100 percent until I know," she said. "Until I know what is going to happen to me."

Invisible man

Pereria never had a chance to find out what would have happened to him. He never got a chance to be certified as a trafficking victim.

Nevertheless, even though his death was never connected to the restaurant, some of the customers Pereria waited on are wondering why they didn't see the invisible chains he claimed he wore to work every day.

"He was clearly in a desperate situation, and it breaks my heart he didn't open up to us a little bit," said Christina Hauck, a Kansas State University professor who was a Monday night regular of Pereria's at the restaurant.

After the discovery of Pereria's body in his apartment, his boss, Amapreet Singh, claimed he was just a "homeless alcoholic." But he later admitted that Pereria had indeed been his employee.

Singh's attorney, Pedro Irigonegaray, conceded that Pereria's death was sad but insisted that Singh wasn't responsible. He vehemently denied that Pereria or other employees were victims of human trafficking.

"Are the allegations ugly?" Irigonegaray said. "They are horrific. ... The fact is while there are serious concerns that must be addressed with human trafficking, that was not the case in our community with these restaurant workers."

Irigonegaray also denied that Singh mistreated his workers in any way.

The government argued that its evidence suggested otherwise. Federal prosecutors presented information from a confidential informant who'd talked with Pereria and other waiters. They had told the informant that Singh withheld their wages. That he also withheld their identification documents. And that he required them to work long hours.

The informant told authorities that Singh forced up to seven workers to live together in the apartment. Pereria had told the informant that he was abused and kept from returning to India.

Under federal law, all are elements of human trafficking. In fact, federal authorities can certify people as human trafficking victims even if no charges are ever brought against their employers. And that's what they did in the Globe Restaurant case when they certified Pereria's co-workers as trafficking victims.

Prosecutors never charged Singh with trafficking. He was charged and convicted of a lesser felony: harboring an illegal immigrant. Prosecutors did argue that Singh deserved an enhanced sentence because he used coercion against Pereria.

But after prosecutors didn't produce witnesses to testify about those allegations, the judge ruled in November that the government's evidence of threats and coercion was not sufficiently compelling and declined to lengthen Singh's sentence. He got 18 months in federal prison, not the 20 years he could have faced if he'd been convicted of trafficking.

There would be no words to the contrary from Pereria. No family reunion, either.

He died on his apartment's bathroom floor. Cause of death: acute pneumonia. The coroner's report noted he was dressed in dark trousers and a white shirt, with a "filthy sock" on his left foot.

On the day he died, sick and helpless, Sebastian Pereria was still wearing his waiter's uniform.

The Star's Mark Morris contributed to this report.

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART ONE

Beginning a descent into despair

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

It's gonna cost you more.

The man's words fill the cramped bedroom inside this dingy, two-story house in Los Angeles. A middle-aged woman stands in front of him, scared, her dream slowly dying.

There are guns on the bed — rifles and a pistol. Her eyes take in everything: the weapons, the man, his words searing and uncompromising, still hanging in the air.

More money.

She's been in America less than a week, stashed away in a house full of immigrants who, like her, just made the illegal trek into America. Any day now she expects to leave this place with the stained carpet and grimy, cream-colored walls to hop a bus and head east to Boston. There's a job waiting for her there, good work taking care of an elderly woman.

But the tired road from Central America has so far just led her here, to this room. She will soon learn her fate. At this moment,

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though, only the questions in her head are coming fast.

How did she end up in this trap, tangled up with a conniving band of human traffickers? How will she get out?

After all that she has suffered, she thinks, *how can I go back now?*

■■■

In Central America, crushing poverty has swallowed the woman and her family.

She lives with more than 20 people in a home built of thick plastic and dirt. It is partitioned into many quarters, and two to three family members share beds at night.

She has come back here after venturing out on her own, and the conditions are worse than she remembered. She had left when she was 18 — just as her sister was getting married — and experienced a better life in Mexico.

It has made her hungry for more.

In Mexico, she made decent money. She got married and lived among the middle class, and things were pretty good there for a while. But her husband began spending their hard-earned cash on other women, and she wasn't going to live like that. The divorce eventually drove her back home.

But now, there are even more mouths to feed. Her married sister has a daughter and two sons, and there is little money for anything beyond basic sustenance.

Despite the comfort of family, the woman feels smothered inside this house of dirt.

She wants more, needs more. She's not a young girl anymore, and her options are dwindling. All her life she's been a nurturer, the kind who cooked and cleaned and took care of kids. But she will have to have money to live out her older years.

She is drawn to the men who come to her town wearing fancy clothes and driving fancy American trucks. In the United States, they brag, there are $14-an-hour jobs.

She allows her mind to wander, to do the math. More money in 60 minutes than she'll make in about a week in Central America.

I want a better life, she decides.

She asks her ex-husband to help her come to America, and he agrees. It will take money and courage and the well-dressed men to make the 2,000-mile journey across Central America, through the badlands of Mexico and to the doorstep of America.

The fee: $5,500.

So much money, and yet, what did the coyotes say?

Life is good there. Whatever you want, it's yours.

■■■

All the woman wants now is freedom. She has made it to America — twice. The first time, she was caught after crossing the border, and it took all the resolve she could muster to try again.

This time, there are other obstacles. Like the man in front of her. The guns scattered on the bed. His words still resonating.

More money.

The fee had already been impossible. Her ex-husband made the down payment of $2,500 and she had planned to come up with the rest somehow.

But the man now tells her they smuggled her in on a "special trip." He needs another

$5,000. *Pay up,* he tells her, *or go back home.*

Go back? After all she's suffered?

The trips north had been brutal. Days in an old pickup truck bouncing along bumpy roads had been the easiest part. Then there was the walking. She is still nursing her aching feet, swollen and discolored from the hours of marching in her ragged shoes.

She is trying hard to forget the desert. The steep hills and thorny handholds. Men starving, waiting for the food they would get once they stopped for the night. Moms trying to calm their crying kids.

Sometimes the only water was from stagnant pools in troughs or bowls left out for livestock or dogs. If she pulled her shirt collar out far enough, she could create a makeshift sieve to pour the water through. At least she could strain out some of the filth.

Through the hunger and thirst, she had pulled herself up those hills, wrapping small, worn hands around branches and rocks.

Hold on tight, she'd tell herself.

She'd made it through the dust and the grit. Through the mounds of loose rock and stinging scrub brush and ominous saguaro cactus standing guard like sentries.

Yes, she had made it. But already, standing in this bedroom, she worries it was all for nothing.

After her first painful trek through the northern Mexican desert, she'd finally crossed the border in California and arrived at a cluster of houses.

For hours, the Sonoran sun had sucked the moisture from her body. Parched and dizzy from dehydration, her lips cracked and peeling, there was only one thing on her mind.

Ahead of her was a clinic. Outside the clinic was a hose.

She knew the risk, but she couldn't resist.

She ran for the hose.

The rest was a blur. An immigration official handing out water and crackers. The monotonous trip back to Mexico. The gradual, sickening realization that she had been tossed back when she was so close.

Not again, she thinks.

▮▮▮

The man is on the phone, and her ex-husband is on the other end. In coming days, there will be more calls with the same demand.

You're gonna have to come up with $5,000 more.

He says he doesn't have it, can't get it. There is not much more to say.

By now, the woman is crying. It seems like she and the man have been in this bedroom a very long time. Outside, there is a house full of dreamers who await the same meeting.

She's thinking so hard, trying to come up with the right answer. And finally, it occurs to her that she can fall back on what she knows, what she's known all her life.

She can cook. She can clean.

Can I work off the debt? she asks.

There are many more illegal immigrants who must be told today of the special trip and the new surcharge. The man gives in.

Why not, he tells her.

Work here in the house until your debt is paid. Fifty dollars a week.

She lets it sink in. Fifty dollars. What choice does she have? The realization hits her.

They own me. Until the debt is paid.

Here in America, she's a slave.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009

KANSAS CITY EDITION WWW.KANSASCITY.COM MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

SPORTS DAILY
The scoreboard said the Buffalo Bills defeated Kansas City 16-10, but the Chiefs beat themselves with numerous mistakes. | B1

FYI
What a week for magical holiday events such as "The Nutcracker" at the Kansas City Ballet. | C1

TODAY'S WEATHER Temperatures plummet Blast that Arctic air! Low 18 High 18
TUESDAY A gust less robust 7 31
WEDNESDAY Winds of change 10 45
THURSDAY The will be a breeze 30 53
FRIDAY A blow to warmth 25 50

SEE THE WEATHER WATCH ON B14 AND GET UPDATES AT KANSASCITY.COM

Cyber hijackers spread shame

Users of social networking sites unwittingly became serial senders of ads.

By BRAD STONE
The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO | It used to be that computer viruses wrecked only your hard drive. Now they wreck your identity.

Malicious programs are rampaging through Web sites such as Facebook and Twitter, spreading themselves by taking over people's accounts and sending out messages to all of their friends and followers. The result is people inadvertently telling their co-workers and loved ones how to make their IQs, make money instantly on Google or watch an irresistible new video in which they star.

"I wonder what people are thinking of tonight now," said Mari Margarey, an engineer at a San Francisco public relations firm whose Twitter account was recently hijacked, showering his followers with messages that appeared to offer a $500 gift card to Victoria's Secret.

Margarey was clueless about the effort until a professional acquaintance asked him about them via e-mail. Confused, he logged into his account and noticed he had been shilling for lingerie for five days.

SEE HIJACK | A8

e KANSASCITY.COM
From a computer or your mobile phone, click on KansasCity.com for ...
| Gary Lezak's weather forecast
| The latest on your favorite celebrities in the Stargazing blog

Bridge games offer strategy for learning

Playing cards helps gifted kids at a KC school develop teamwork and math skills.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | The desperate plight of many women

SNARES OF THE SEX TRADE

Held by traffickers and forced to work to pay off her debt, this Central American woman knows firsthand the horrors of human trafficking

Even though the law is designed to help such women, the government often fails to reach them.

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

Sitting in the Boone County jail, the Chinese woman didn't look like a criminal to Kelley Lucero. She looked like a middle-aged mom.

Soon, Lucero learned that the woman had indeed come to America to scout out a college for her teenage son. She had come, legally, as part of a cultural exchange program, but her life had taken an unexpected and terrifying turn here in Middle America.

Forced to work in a one-room massage parlor, she ended up being arrested for prostitution at a truck stop between Kansas City and St. Louis.

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And yet, the Chinese woman sat in jail for five months.

When the United States took a global stand on human trafficking in 2000, lawmakers wanted to rescue foreign-born women turned into American sex slaves. In too many cases, though, that hasn't happened.

In its six-month investigation into America's effectiveness in the war on human trafficking, The Kansas City Star found that the system originally designed with sex trafficking in mind is often unsuccessful in reaching

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART TWO

A slave to time and money

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

run-down, two-story home in Los Angeles that serves as a way station

SEX TRADE: Traumatized women often don't get help

Time after time, they run from trouble

VICTIMS: Those born in America are trapped as well

Determined prosecutor combats trafficking with novel tactics

Cumbersome rules plague visas

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Some are mistakenly identified as prostitutes and end up either lost in the criminal justice bureaucracy or back on the streets. Even when victims are identified by law enforcement, some are reluctant to go through the gantlet that accompanies the prosecution of their trafficker, too untrusting or scared to reveal the horrible things that happened to them. Critics complain that the U.S. law is inherently flawed because it connects victims' aid with their willingness to help make cases.

"No one is seeing the situation for what it is," said Karen Stauss, an attorney with Polaris Project, an anti-trafficking organization based in Washington, D.C. "It's like we're saying, 'We blame you for what you are suffering.'."

The government also has been slow to recognize an emerging class of new victims: young American girls. While millions are spent each year to combat international sex trafficking, lawmakers have yet to approve funding for domestic victims — perhaps the fastest-growing class of those trafficked in the United States.

Anti-trafficking experts say that the current federal and state laws are blunt legal instruments in trying to address the complexity of an ever-evolving global criminal enterprise and do not account for the trauma of women forced into sexual abuse. Of all human trafficking crimes, The Star found, the ones involving sex slavery have proved to be the most difficult when it comes to catching and prosecuting the traffickers.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act "is not creating the legal environment we worked so hard to create so we can prevent human trafficking," said Norma Ramos, of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. "It's a federal law that's really not that useful for what it was supposed to do — end human trafficking."

All in the approach

When the mother from China was arrested, deputies in Boone County hadn't been trained to recognize human trafficking. They didn't know what questions to ask.

Or that the crime requires a victim-centered approach, much different from what officers are traditionally schooled in.

Boone County Assistant Prosecutor Merilee Crockett said she couldn't discuss specifics of the case, but generally cases that may involve human trafficking are a "conundrum" because if victims are released they could end up back with their traffickers. And sometimes there is no safe place to keep them other than jail.

"Where is the rescue? What do we do for them? How do we protect them?" Crockett said.

Law enforcement authorities also have different priorities, explained Ivy Suriyopas, staff attorney for the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. "They focus on catching perpetrators, making sure the public is safe from additional crimes. That doesn't necessarily correlate with the needs of the victims."

Some police officers get it and know how to work human trafficking cases, advocates acknowledged. Yet many don't. At least not at this point.

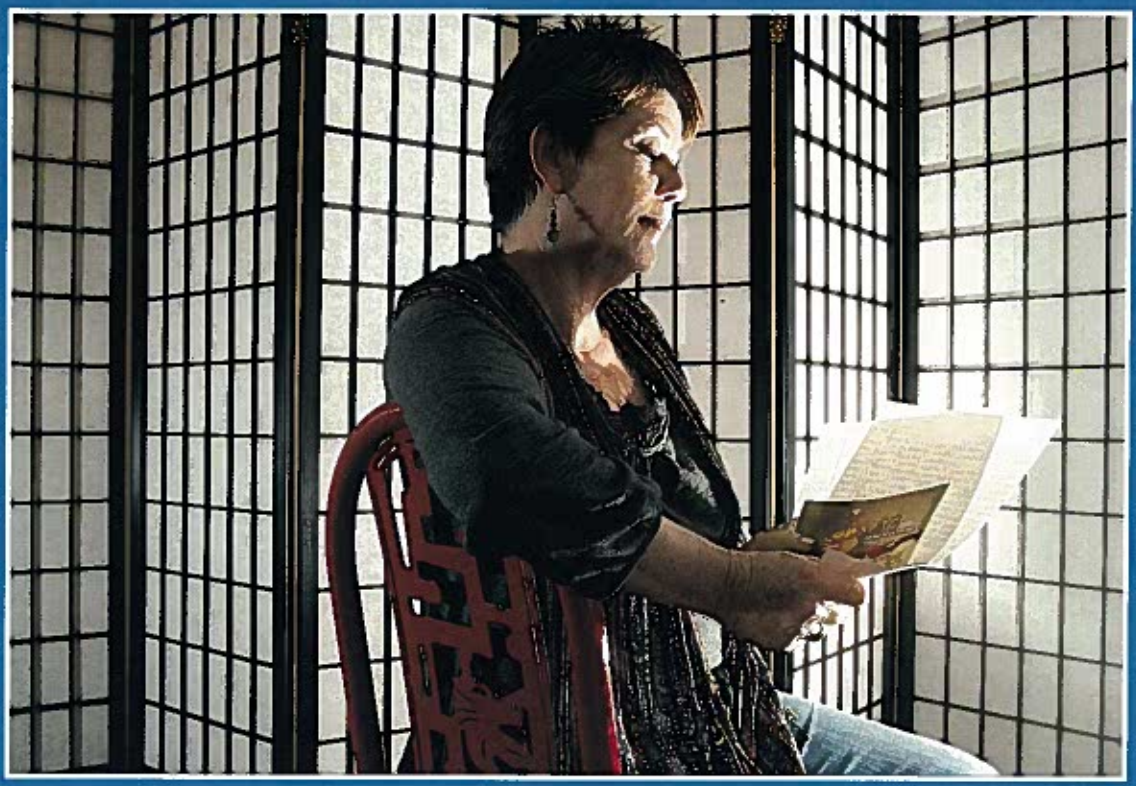
But experts say that's not surprising.

"They are being asked to take off their glasses and put on a slightly different prescription," said Bill Bernstein of Mosaic Family Services, which works with human trafficking survivors in Dallas. "They're having to view some people who we think might be victims in a slightly different light. That's beginning, but it will take time."

Further complicating anti-trafficking efforts is that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are supposed to not only screen victims for possible human trafficking, but also root out illegal immigration — what some see as a conflict of interest.

At the very least, that creates an "inherent challenge," according to Kristyn Peck Williams, screening and field coordinator of the anti-trafficking services program for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"ICE would do the raid, but they would also be the ones in the position to identify trafficking victims," Williams said.



As a coordinator for a domestic violence shelter in Columbia, Kelley Lucero has seen many sad cases — one of the most heartrending of which involved a Chinese woman forced into prostitution at Missouri truck stops. Here Lucero reviews letters she received from the woman while she was in jail.

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

The initial contact with potential victims is crucial, advocates maintain. If agents use the same hard demeanor they use investigating other crimes, it can further traumatize a victim and destroy the case.

In one instance, a federal agent in the southern region of the United States interviewed a foreign-born woman picked up in a brothel raid. "So you were a prostitute?" the agent asked during the investigation.

An immigration attorney in the room told The Star that the woman instantly clammed up. Later, she was deported.

"I've seen a lot of women who were helped, but I see a lot of women who slipped through the cracks," said the attorney, who didn't want to be identified for fear of retribution by law enforcement.

In routine prostitution cases, officers are usually only interested in the money generated by the ring and the people involved. But human trafficking cases require more sensitivity and different questions.

"We now ask, 'Where do you live? Who do you live with? Where did you come from? How are you paid?'." said Capt. Ken Bergman of the Independence Police Department, who works with the local anti-trafficking task force and has six "very trained" detectives who know how to identify victims.

The local task force has trained more than 2,000 officers throughout Missouri and Kansas about trafficking.

Still, that's only a fraction of the officers in both states.

"You have to know what you are looking for or you will miss it," Bergman said.

Without the right approach, a sex trafficking victim can be recycled into a lifetime of slavery.

Help us, we'll help you

From the outset, the system set up to help trafficking victims had a major flaw, advocates found. Especially when it came to helping sex trafficking victims.

The protection act concentrated on three Ps: preventing trafficking, protecting victims and prosecuting the traffickers. Some critics, however, believe that the United States has put too much emphasis on prosecution.

Victims are required to show reasonable cooperation with law enforcement before they receive all the benefits intended for them, such as food stamps, shelter and the opportunity to stay in America.

In effect, victims are told, they may not get help from the government unless they help the government prosecute the trafficker.

"It is very wrong to have this condition," said Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, appointed last year as the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on human trafficking. "Countries must avoid that."

Victims are not given enough time for reflection or counseling, Ezeilo said, before they have to agree to cooperate. Given time to heal, some victims may be more likely to help prosecute their trafficker.

Kelly Heinrich, who has studied human trafficking and the laws addressing it, said the federal law is more witness-centered.

"It's the way it was designed to begin with and implementation made it worse," Heinrich said.

Many victims aren't stable enough to immediately tolerate having to relive what they went through, said Judy Okawa, a licensed psychologist specializing in the evaluation and treatment of survivors of severe trauma.

One sex trafficking survivor Okawa has worked with said she relives her abuse every time the sun goes down. She told Okawa it's then — when the quality of light is at a certain level — she's reminded of the time she was forced to have sex.

Other survivors have different triggers. But the last thing they want to do is speak of the abuse. Or look into the eyes of the perpetrator.

It brings it all back, Okawa said. The fear. And the threats.

"If that trafficker is not in jail or dead, there's always a chance he or she will hurt them," Okawa said. "(The trafficker) says, 'You can run, but you can't hide from me. I will find you and I

will kill your family.'."

One trafficking victim reached out to a domestic violence advocacy program in Kansas. Her trafficker was forcing her to work long hours for little pay, stopping her from leaving the country, and frequently sexually assaulting her.

Pregnant with his baby, she wanted help.

But she was afraid to pursue a trafficking visa designed for victims because it would mean having to report her trafficker, which could put her, and her baby, in more danger.

"Although she may have had a remedy available ... she didn't feel like she could do that. She was too afraid," said Pamela Jacobs, immigration project attorney for the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence.

"Being asked to testify against a person you've been afraid of for a long time, and someone who could still hurt you, and your child, is very difficult. Just having a visa does not guarantee a victim's safety."

The woman did not see a way to escape, and advocates do not know what happened to her.

Consensual arrangement?

In the late spring of 2007, Johnson County authorities undertook the first major human trafficking investigation in the Kansas City area. Law enforcement at the time said they "rescued" 15 women from strip-mall Asian massage parlors — one called China Rose — and there could be many more victims.

Originally from China and Korea, the women worked 14 hours a day, seven days a week, performing sex acts. Sometimes they slept on the same bed where they serviced customers.

For investigators, on paper they looked like human trafficking victims.

But as time went on, and the case wound through criminal court, more information surfaced. Some women came to Kansas City knowing they would work as prostitutes. One woman, according to statements made by one of the defendants, made about $15,000 in a month.

Others said they had no idea they would be prostituted when they got here.

Ultimately, prosecutors didn't charge the four main defendants with human trafficking. Instead, they were charged with and pleaded guilty to coercing females to travel for prostitution.

Court testimony and other information prompted the federal judge hearing the case to dismiss the notion that there were "vulnerable victims."

"The victims were more participants than victims," said Chief U.S. District Judge Fernando Gaitan in sentencing the lead defendant, Ling Xu. "They appeared to be professionals."

Defense attorney Melanie Morgan, who represented Ling, said she believes prosecutors tried too hard to make the case into something it wasn't.

"This wasn't human trafficking," Morgan said. "This was a very consensual arrangement."

The case provided a small window into the complexity of sex trafficking investigations. Prosecutors across the country are filtering through scenarios where the water is muddy regarding what is coercion and what is consensual.

In the China Rose case, federal prosecutors said evidence supported the charges filed, and the government still contends that some of the women met the definition of a human trafficking victim.

Those women were offered trafficking visas, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Cynthia Cordes, who specializes in trafficking cases.

"But they wanted to return home to their families," Cordes explained.

Our own backyard

Ever since passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act nearly a decade ago, foreign-born victims have been the law's focus. They get extensive counseling, visa assistance and help with food and housing costs as they rebuild their lives.

For victims born in the United States, however, state governments were expected to take care of children prostituted by pimps or family members.

But that rarely happens, The Star found.

"You talk about frustration," said Thomas Egan of Catholic Charities in Phoenix. "We found hundreds of prostituted kids and no funding available to help them."

Kristy Childs sees it every day.

As founder and director of the nonprofit Veronica's Voice, Childs works to help Kansas City area women and girls escape the commercial sex industry.

That's what Childs did this summer when she and her staff searched the streets for a 12-year-old girl. Day after day, they heard from sources on the street, the junior-high-school girl was forced to prostitute herself.

"Every day she's out there, she's in more danger," Childs said one day as they went out to search again. "...We're trying to save the world and we can't. We can't even save the victims in our own backyard."

With American-born victims, it becomes a maddening game of catch and release.

Most welfare programs require recipients to be at least 18 to receive benefits. Since many young domestic trafficking victims are considered unaccompanied minors, they don't qualify.

Critics said this is another area where the law is deeply flawed.

"They (lawmakers) messed up," said Theresa Flores, who was sex trafficked as a teenager growing up in Michigan and now works as a victim advocate. "They didn't include Americans, and they should have."

Four years ago, Childs and other advocates lobbied U.S. legislators to make it clear that domestic victims should be protected under the act. They specifically wanted American-born girls under the age of 18 who are sex trafficked to be considered victims entitled to services and benefits.

Lawmakers included that provision in the 2005 reauthorization of the protection act.

But they didn't fund services for domestic victims, leaving thousands of young girls vulnerable to further abuse.

"We're going to point the finger at other countries for how they deal with their domestic trafficking, but then we're not doing enough for our own citizens?" asked Colette Bercu of Tennessee's Free for Life International, a nonprofit organization that supports trafficking survivors. "We've got a problem."

At a national symposium in July, social workers and health care experts pointed out that resources available to help domestic victims don't come close to what's available for foreign-born victims.

Near the top of the list is housing. Police and community organizations are having a tough time finding somewhere to take domestic victims lucky enough to have escaped their pimps.

"As a result, many domestic minor victims are housed in juvenile detention centers, which often do not recognize or treat these youth as victims of a crime, but rather as perpetrators," a symposium report said.

Cordes said she prosecutes domestic sex trafficking cases with the same fervor as cases with international victims but it can be challenging.

"We have a duty to protect our own citizens and children," she said. "Because the domestic victims are ineligible for funding under the (protection act) each case demands extra effort and creativity to obtain services."

More than 1,800 Las Vegas youths under the age of 18 were in juvenile lockup on prostitution-related charges between 1996 and 2007, according to a study released this year by Shared Hope International, which rescues victims of sex trafficking. In Dallas, 165 youths were in police custody on prostitution-related charges in 2007 alone. Shared Hope of-

ficials believe all of these kids were victims and should not have been thrown in jail.

"We have to stop criminalizing, arresting the kids," said Shared Hope founder Linda Smith.

For the 12-year-old in Kansas City, police were more understanding. Especially after Childs called them when her search came up empty.

Within a day, law enforcement had found her. But only after two officers spent a night doing nothing but looking for her. She was taken to a local hospital and examined.

Authorities tried to connect her with Veronica's Voice and Childs, to get her the counseling she needed. But somehow she slipped away.

Now, Childs worries she's back on the streets.

A long way home

With foreign-born human trafficking victims, the line between victim and criminal isn't always clear, either.

Consider the Chinese woman Lucero met in jail.

The woman paid $13,000 — her family's life savings — to enroll in what she thought was a cultural exchange program that would bring her to the United States. Her teenage son planned to go to college in America, and someone in their family had to come in advance to get a job and earn money.

She made the trip on a six-month visa, Lucero said. But when she got off the plane in Los Angeles, she was taken to a Chinese restaurant where she went to work washing dishes.

Next, she thought she'd get a job as a nanny for a wealthy family. But then she met a man who said he was from her province in China. He told her about the massage business, how she could get a license and make good money.

She believed him. With what the woman thought was a legitimate license in hand, she traveled with several other women to the Midwest.

Twelve of them worked 12 hours a day inside cramped parlors set up inside truck stops across Middle America.

"They gave her half of what she was making," Lucero said, noting that she still knows very little about the traffickers.

The woman ended up with a couple of hundred dollars a week. Most she'd send to family back in China.

Then police got a tip about a one-room massage parlor operated out of a Boone County truck stop along Interstate 70. The night she was arrested, police didn't have a translator and she couldn't tell her story.

The Chinese woman never told Lucero all she was forced to do. She even denied having sex.

"It would be too humiliating," Lucero explained.

The woman spent Christmas 2007 behind bars.

"My parents are old and sick," she later wrote Lucero. "My mother knows I'm in jail and she's had a heart attack and is in the hospital. My husband (still in China) ... can't work because of my situation."

Eventually, charges were dismissed. The woman went to California and got her temporary visa extended. Then she headed east to work, she said, in a market.

But before she left the Midwest, she wrote Lucero about missing her homeland.

"The only thing I wish for is to leave America and go to my loved ones," she said. "I feel like America is a place where they talk a lot about human rights, and I know I have the right to go back to China. Can you please help me?"

For almost a year, Lucero didn't hear from her and wasn't sure where she ended up.

Then last week, Lucero received an e-mail. The woman is on the East Coast waiting for her green card.

"She just wanted to say Merry Christmas to me and tell me that she loves me," Lucero said. "And that we have a special connection."

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART TWO

A slave to time and money

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

It's 3 a.m. and another load of chickens is about to roll in.

"Chickens." That's what the human traffickers call them. These fresh loads of unwitting immigrants smuggled over the border and into southern California from points south.

The woman from Central America had been one of them once. She came here several summers ago in anticipation of landing a good job out east.

Then the traffickers derailed her plans, demanding more money. She's counted a couple of birthdays in this run-down, two-story home in Los Angeles that serves as a way station for illegal immigrants, many of whom are pressed into servitude.

Most days, she follows the same routine. She gets up at 6 a.m., pulls herself off the grungy floor where she sleeps shoulder-to-shoulder with other hostages, cooks for everyone and cleans the house.

They watch her every move. She's never left alone. Never allowed to talk to people on the outside.

Sometimes, she's taken to clean

SEE HOSTAGE | A12

other traffickers' houses. At night, she and others are locked in a room. The men with guns and threats want to protect their property.

The days run together. But now, the end is in sight. Her traffickers have told her she's almost paid off her debt.

Just four more months.

As she thinks about the new arrivals, the woman prepares coffee. She'll tend to their needs, as she has done for nearly three years. But that connection she's always shared with other victims is beginning to fade. Soon, she knows, she won't be one of them.

For now, though, she must get up. There are new people to serve.

■■■

The faces never seem to change.

The woman has seen hundreds of them. Some are hopeful, some weathered and weary, and others never get past dazed.

Scrawled along the walls of the house are the markers of their time here. Like prison inmates, they write names and dates as reminders of time served.

At the moment, she's one of eight women held in this place. They are the cooking and cleaning crew, and it's a full-time job.

The carpets are worn and dirty from the constant traffic. Food and dishes are scattered everywhere in this four-bedroom, two-bath drop house.

No one goes hungry here. The traffickers always provide plenty of staples. Beans and rice. Beef and chicken. Big bags of cheap Mexican bread for the immigrants. One item they cannot eat. Pan dulce, sugary Mexican sweet bread, is strictly for the men in charge.

For the woman, serving food is perhaps the one thing she enjoys. She understands what a hot meal means to the poor people dropped off here. It usually comes with a smile — a rare display of warmth in this grim place.

This morning, the delivery is earlier than normal.

They arrive dusty, after days without washing. On the exhausting trek, some pay the men 10 pesos for a bucket of water, just so they can wash away some of the trip.

These new arrivals keep showing up. They have no way of knowing what's awaiting them here.

■■■

She remembers what the men say when new people, especially young women, come into the house.

Let's see what new merchandise we have.

The raping of young women is only part of the torture. Some immigrants are burned with cigarettes or subjected to electric shock. For many, walking through this door will be their last act of freedom until "debts" are paid in full.

They will at least get a day or two to rest. Then the demands for more money will come. The coyotes also will make phone calls to family members with orders to hand over cash.

Some will plan an escape. Most will fight through a jumble of emotions. Part of her job, as always, will be to calm the most agitated — the wailing or unruly — fearing that outbursts are contagious and will infect the entire group.

Four more months, she thinks.

The new arrivals file in, their squinting eyes adjusting from predawn darkness to the well-lit living room. Their feet are blistered and legs aching from the journey.

The woman scans their faces. They are like so many of the other faces.

Except one.

She has seen this face before. Back in Central America. Back in the house she shared with her sister and family.

For a moment, the anguish and fear and panic are so strong that the woman forgets her eyes can tell a story. *Can they see the pain? The spark of recognition?*

She pours the coffee, avoiding eye contact with one particular young woman. She hopes the men won't notice her rapid breathing, the sudden rush of blood to her face.

For her, there is no one else in the room, no one else in the world. She can't not look, it's impossible. She hasn't seen the young woman in three years, and this is the last place on earth she wants to see her now.

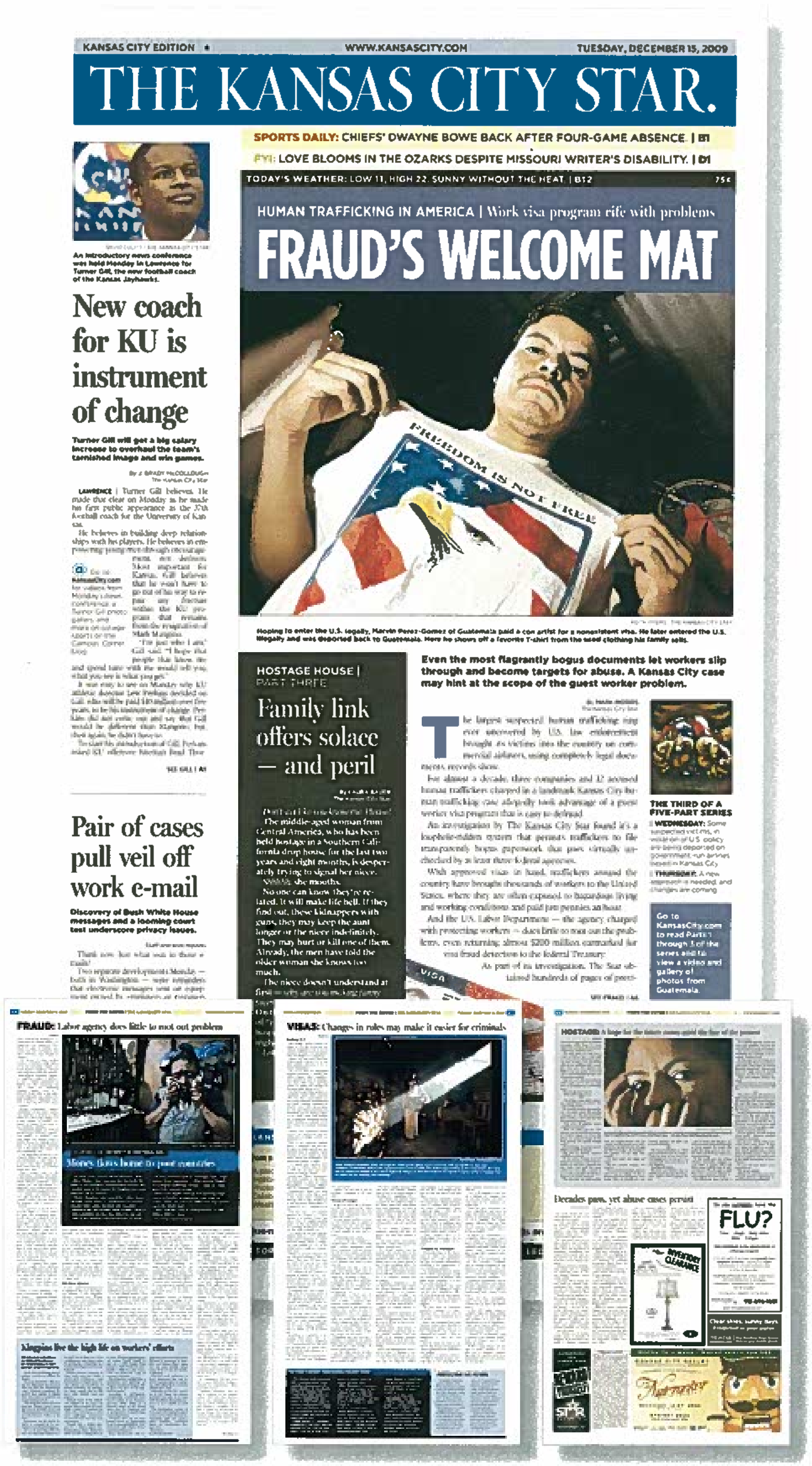
The world fell on me, she says to herself.

Their eyes lock. Her heart beating fast, the middle-aged woman prays the girl won't say the word she must be thinking.

Tia. Aunt.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2009



KANSAS CITY EDITION • WWW.KANSASCITY.COM TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2009

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

SPORTS DAILY: CHIEFS' DWAYNE BOWE BACK AFTER FOUR-GAME ABSENCE. | B1

FYI: LOVE BLOOMS IN THE OZARKS DESPITE MISSOURI WRITER'S DISABILITY. | D1

TODAY'S WEATHER: LOW 11, HIGH 22. SUNNY WITHOUT THE HEAT | B12

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | Work visa program rife with problems

FRAUD'S WELCOME MAT

Hoping to enter the U.S. legally, Marvin Perez-Gomez of Guatemala paid a con artist for a nonexistent visa. He later entered the U.S. illegally and was deported back to Guatemala. Here he shows off a favorite T-shirt from the used clothing his family sells.

Even the most flagrantly bogus documents let workers slip through and become targets for abuse. A Kansas City case may hint at the scope of the guest worker problem.

THE THIRD OF A FIVE-PART SERIES

Go to KansasCity.com to read Parts 1 through 3 of the series and to view a video and gallery of photos from Guatemala.

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART THREE

Family link offers solace — and peril

The middle-aged woman from Central America, who has been held hostage in a Southern California drop house for the last two years and eight months, is desperately trying to signal her niece.

No one can know they're related. It will make life hell. If they find out, these kidnappers with guns, they may keep the aunt longer or the niece indefinitely. They may hurt or kill one of them. Already, the men have told the older woman she knows too much.

The niece doesn't understand at first ...

An introductory news conference was held Monday in Lawrence for Turner Gill, the new football coach of the Kansas Jayhawks.

New coach for KU is instrument of change

Turner Gill will get a big salary increase to overhaul the team's tarnished image and win games.

Pair of cases pull veil off work e-mail

Discovery of Bush White House messages and a looming court test underscore privacy issues.

FRAUD: Labor agency does little to root out problem

Money flows home to poor countries

Kingpins live the high life on workers' efforts

VISAS: Changes in rules may make it easier for criminals

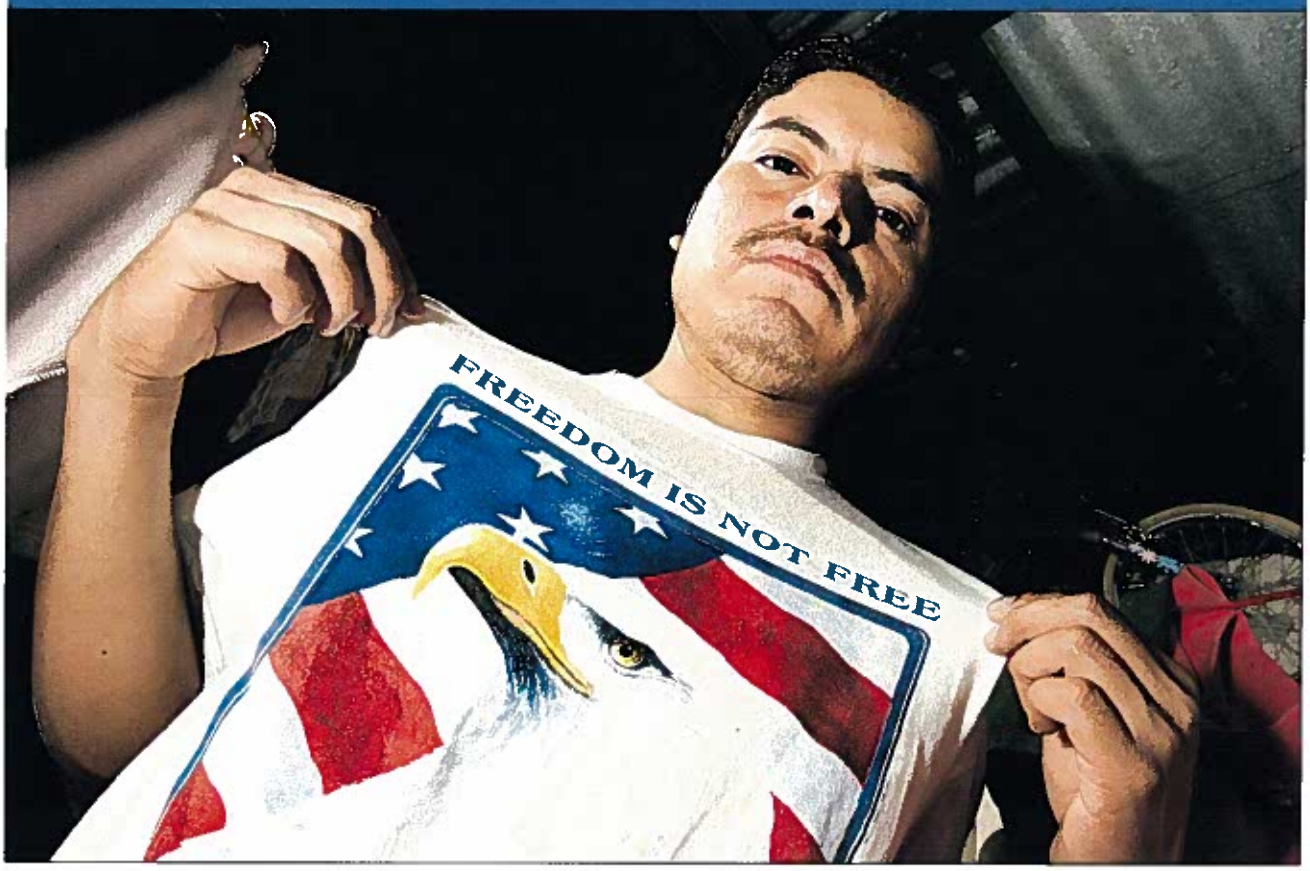
HOSTAGE: A hope for the future among the fear of the present

Decades pass, yet abuse cases persist

FLU?

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | Work visa program rife with problems

FRAUD'S WELCOME MAT



KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Hoping to enter the U.S. legally, Marvin Perez-Gomez of Guatemala paid a con artist for a nonexistent visa. He later entered the U.S. illegally and was deported back to Guatemala. Here he shows off a favorite T-shirt from the used clothing his family sells.

Even the most flagrantly bogus documents let workers slip through and become targets for abuse. A Kansas City case may hint at the scope of the guest worker problem.

By MARK MORRIS
The Kansas City Star

The largest suspected human trafficking ring ever uncovered by U.S. law enforcement brought its victims into the country on commercial airliners, using completely legal documents, records show.

For almost a decade, three companies and 12 accused human traffickers charged in a landmark Kansas City human trafficking case allegedly took advantage of a guest worker visa program that is easy to defraud.

An investigation by The Kansas City Star found it's a loophole-ridden system that permits traffickers to file transparently bogus paperwork that goes virtually unchecked by at least three federal agencies.

With approved visas in hand, traffickers around the country have brought thousands of workers to the United States, where they are often exposed to hazardous living and working conditions and paid just pennies an hour.

And the U.S. Labor Department — the agency charged with protecting workers — does little to root out the problems, even returning almost $200 million earmarked for visa fraud detection to the federal Treasury.

As part of its investigation, The Star obtained hundreds of pages of previously undisclosed investigative records from the alleged Kansas City conspiracy and examined thousands of pages of wiretap transcripts and other documents from labor trafficking cases around the country.

The stories of abuse include workers in Missouri being injured on the job and going without adequate medical treatment because their employers didn't buy workers' compensation insurance; employers requiring workers in Alabama to rent crowded apartments so shabby that they resembled "pig sties" while the trafficking schemes' leaders

lived in a $700,000 home with an air-conditioned doghouse; and women illegally working in a Tennessee motel paid so little that they were "dying of hunger."

Federal prosecutors exposed weaknesses in the guest worker visa program as recently as May, when they announced human trafficking charges in Kansas City against the leaders of the Giant Labor Solutions conspiracy.

Prosecutors alleged that GLS and others brought more than 1,000 foreign workers to Missouri, stole their wages and exposed some to terrible living and working conditions. It's the first human trafficking case in the nation filed under federal racketeering laws.

Some defendants in the GLS case allegedly heaped debt onto workers and threatened to have them deported if they didn't illegally perform work that was not permitted under their visas.

Those victims came to the United States carrying visas issued by the government's H-2B program, which funnels temporary guest workers into non-agricultural, seasonal jobs, such as those in the hospitality and landscaping industries.

At a recent court hearing on the GLS case, Assistant U.S. Attorney Cynthia Cordes said that flaws in the program make it attractive to criminals.

"The structure of the H-2B visa program makes it a prime vehicle for gross and widespread abuse," Cordes said. "As evident by the indictment itself, the H-2B visa program offers a means to take advantage of international workers and empowers criminals to have the upper hand once the workers have arrived in the United States."

To be sure, thousands of legitimate businesses use the H-2B program to find temporary, full-time help for peak periods when Americans are not available or do not want the jobs. For honest employers, the paperwork process can be arduous and painstaking.

But for a criminal labor broker with no scruples about falsifying applications, obtaining visas is simple. What's more, federal labor officials admit they have no authority to enforce the terms of the contracts between foreign workers and the employers who bring them over.

During a recent debriefing with federal prosecutors in Virginia, Gabor Teglasi — a Hungarian illegally in the United States — bragged about how he and others exploited American guest worker visas to traffic thousands of foreigners to St. Louis and other cities.

"The United States deserved what happened in this case," Teglasi said.

But instead of tightening the program, federal bureaucrats recently "streamlined" it so that guest worker visas could be approved more quickly and with even less oversight, The Star's investigation found.

The ease with which the system can be defrauded allows criminals to use U.S. law to turn foreign workers into something very close to slaves, said Mary Bauer, legal director of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"For too long, our country has benefited from the labor provided by guest workers but has failed to provide a fair system that respects their human rights and upholds the most basic values of our democracy," Bauer said.

Red flags ignored

H-2B is a small visa program used by businesses that can't find American workers to take temporary, full-time seasonal jobs. Workers with such visas clean hotels, shuck shellfish and teach youngsters to ski at Colorado ski resorts.

Given the size of the U.S. work force, the program is relatively tiny. Only 66,000 new visas are approved every year.

Until some recent rules went into effect, applications were submitted first to state labor agencies, which verified that employers had made good-faith efforts to hire Americans by advertising the jobs and interviewing applicants.

Criminals quickly found ways around that.

One East Coast visa fraud conspiracy simply scheduled interviews with U.S. applicants for inconvenient times, such as 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve. The few Americans who actually appeared reported later that the interviewers were "intimidating" and made the jobs sound "as bad as possible."

Even false financial information sometimes doesn't raise red flags.

In application after application, The Star's investigation found that the U.S. departments of Labor, Homeland Security and State routinely certified and approved the applications and issued the visas.

Last year, Ilkham Fazilov, a Kansas City defendant in the GLS case, signed paperwork on behalf of Five Star Cleaning, asking for 87 H-2B visas.

In the application, Five Star contended that it had a gross annual income of almost $1.6 million and employed more than 90 employees since January 2007. The spreadsheets also gave a detailed accounting of its payroll and hours worked for the entire year of 2007.

A check by authorities with state incorporation records — available online without cost — would have shown that none of that was true. Fazilov didn't incorporate Five Star Cleaning until Dec. 18, 2007.

While Five Star also claimed to have the money to pay workers once they arrived in the United States, a review of records by The Star showed that the company conducted no bank activity in 2007.

Government watchdogs also might have noticed that GLS and Crystal Management, two other companies charged in Kansas City, each submitted identical financial information on their visa requests.

Indeed, both companies reported the exact same gross annual income — $1,434,347 — and the same annual profit down to the penny — $125,414.11.

Examples outside of Missouri aren't hard to find, either. In 2007, the government issued 25 H-2B visas for a Virginia contractor that provided workers to load trucks from a nearby manufacturing plant onto rail cars. But the plant had stopped producing trucks almost a year before.

Immigration lawyer Kent Felty, who represented trafficking victims in civil suits against an Oklahoma company, said he isn't surprised that such red flags go unnoticed.

"None of the people involved in the H-2B process talk to each other," Felty explained.

Searching for fraud can be time-consuming and expensive. But sometimes even having Congress appropriate millions to combat it isn't enough.

Congress ordered the Department of Homeland Security in 2005 to collect a new $150 fee for H-2B visa applications and give a portion to the Department of Labor for fraud prevention and detection.

But that money never was spent, The Star's investigation found.

The Labor Department allowed almost $200 million collected for visa fraud enforcement to lie dormant over the last two years, apparently because it questioned whether it could legally spend the money.

A Department of Labor spokesman said that much of that $200 million was earmarked to investigate fraud in another guest worker visa program. That money was returned to the Treasury, he said, because without complaints, the department has no authority to look for fraud.

The $200 million lapse was "unconscionable," said the chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, Rep. George Miller of California. He added that rooting out fraud and abuse in guest worker programs must be a higher priority.

"Congress is working with the new administration to ensure that they will be able to use these funds to prevent fraud committed by unscrupulous labor recruiters, and businesses that exploit guest workers and deny jobs to U.S. workers," Miller said.

In a statement to The Star, Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis pledged to improve her department's fraud-prevention record.

"Ensuring compliance with our laws is a priority for this

administration," Solis said. "Any deficiencies in past strategies to achieve that end will be addressed, and we will continue to strengthen our efforts to ensure we are not only detecting foreign labor fraud and assisting in prosecuting offenders, but preventing criminals from taking advantage of the programs in the first place."

Busting GLS

Investigative records recently obtained by The Star reveal that procedural safeguards in the H-2B visa program had little to do with uncovering the alleged GLS conspiracy.

Rather, the case broke open after federal agents followed up on tips from business associates of the accused conspirators.

On Oct. 11, 2007, two disgruntled business associates of alleged conspiracy kingpin Abror Askarkhodjaev opened the door to investigators. And while those associates looked on, agents tore through the Westport Road offices of GLS.

Poring through filing cabinets, investigators found labor contracts with more than a dozen hotels and golf courses between Overland Park and South Carolina, including the Westin Crown Center and two Kansas City area Hilton properties, the Doubletree and the Embassy Suites on the Plaza. Other than denying any wrongdoing, spokesmen for the hotels declined to comment on the case, citing the pending investigation.

Agents also scrutinized payroll records, visa applications and personnel files on foreign workers employed by GLS.

One of the associates pointed agents to computers that held digital copies of more payroll and employment data. A computer expert swooped in and copied the hard drives, which took investigators and prosecutors months to digest.

The agents' next reported foray into the GLS offices came on April 15, 2009, the day after they interviewed an unhappy worker.

Alexis Julio Tejeda Encarnacion had been recruited in the Dominican Republic to work for Crystal Management, a company affiliated with GLS, according to authorities.

Encarnacion's family had gone $3,000 in debt to send him to work in the United States. Arriving in February with 25 other Dominicans, he was told that he would instead be working for GLS, a violation of his visa.

Two days later, a GLS manager gathered the workers in a motel parking lot in Johnson County and sorted them by English-speaking ability. The five best English speakers, including Encarnacion, were to stay and work in Kansas City.

GLS loaded the rest onto vans and shipped them to a DVD manufacturing plant in Alabama. In a recent interview, Ronny Marty, a Dominican who worked for GLS at the Alabama plant, confirmed Encarnacion's story.

"When we arrived in Kansas City they changed everything," Marty recalled. "They said, 'We don't have any hotel jobs, but we have jobs with DVDs. If you don't like it, you can go back to your country.'."

GLS housed the five workers remaining in Kansas City in a two-bedroom apartment. Together, the workers paid GLS $1,500 a month for an apartment that the company rented for just $600.

Encarnacion lost a full 65 hours of wages over his first seven weeks of work because of deductions for his visa, uniforms and transportation.

Marty said he faced a similar situation in Alabama. "This guy was charging us for everything," Marty said.

On Tax Day 2009, federal agents wired Encarnacion with electronic audio and video equipment and sent him to GLS offices to complain that he wasn't making enough to help his family pay off the $3,000 debt.

According to a summary of the meeting, Viorel Simon, now a defendant in the human trafficking case, warned Encarnacion that if he quit his hotel job, GLS would cancel his visa and he would become an illegal immigrant.

Simon also refused Encarnacion's plea for cheaper rent, transportation and visa fees.

"Simon told him that it was his problem," according to the summary.

'Dying of hunger'

If things go wrong for H-2B workers after they arrive in the United States, they quickly learn they have even fewer protections than migrant farm workers.

Already deeply in debt to a recruiter, the workers have no option of changing jobs and can't use federally funded legal services available to guest workers in other visa programs.

Complaining often is futile.

As one of the top managers of a Virginia-based labor contracting firm, Dzmitry Krasautsau heard those complaints. Until last December, his job was to make certain that hundreds of foreign employees that his conspiracy had hired under the H-2B program kept going to work each day.

Krasautsau also had to take the calls when workers asked why deductions for rent and transportation made their paychecks so small.

But unlike most labor traffickers, Krasautsau and his co-conspirators had drifted into the crosshairs of a federal task force, which recorded his telephone calls.

Transcripts of those calls obtained by The Star show that, on Nov. 4, 2008, a Jamaican labor recruiter called Krasautsau to complain about how he was treating five women who worked for him as housekeepers. After two weeks of long hours at a motel in Gatlinburg, Tenn., the women had received paychecks totaling less than $50 each.

"This is very desperate," said the Jamaican recruiter. "Those girls in Tennessee, they are dying of hunger. Nobody has any money."

Krasautsau later was convicted of conspiracy to transport and harbor illegal aliens, money laundering and visa fraud and is now serving a 78-month prison sentence.

The Star found that not all labor trafficking schemes involve hundreds of workers spread over big cities in dozens of states.

For seven months between 2005 and 2006, four Filipino workers lived in fear of two motel owners in Oacoma, S.D. — population 406.

After Robert and Angelita Farrell arranged for the workers to come to the United States, they immediately took their passports, cut their already minimum-wage pay in half, required them to work long hours with no overtime, and loaded them with debt in the form of visa fees, transportation costs and exorbitant rent.

At first, workers accepted the hardships, believing that their employers had their best interests at heart.

"They knew better," Gina Agulto, one of the workers, told jurors at the Farrells' criminal trial.

The Farrells insisted that the workers take second jobs at fast food restaurants to generate fatter paychecks, which the workers then signed over to the motel owners to pay off their escalating debts. The couple also insisted that the workers not talk to other people in town, speak with their American co-workers or go anywhere without their permission.

According to allegations in a civil suit filed in March in South Dakota, the scheme unraveled after Robert Farrell appeared in the workers' apartment one evening and dumped the bloody carcasses of two deer on the floor, intending the workers to use the meat for food.

Finally, the workers alerted authorities.

Indeed, criminals sometimes can scam thousands of dollars from the unwary by dangling the mere *promise* of an H-2B visa in front of a prospective worker.

Marvin Danilo Perez-Gomez, of Chimaltenango, Guatemala, quit his job making fireworks and paid $2,000 to an unsavory recruiter, who promised an H-2B visa and a legal job planting pine trees in Mississippi.

But he was disappointed when he arrived at the U.S. Embassy to process the paperwork and get his visa.

"There were more than 50 peasants, and the American officers were laughing at us," Perez-Gomez told The Star. "They denied my visa just like they did with all who were there."

Perez-Gomez eventually entered the United States illegally and began work at a Postville, Iowa, meatpacking plant. Immigration agents raided the plant in 2008, and he eventually was deported.

Don Mooers, a lawyer representing Save Small Business, which lobbies on behalf of legitimate businesses using the H-2B program, said his group supports reasonable regulations to better protect workers.

"These workers need to be treated fairly," Mooers said, "and the employers need to respect the program."

'Virtually no oversight'

Uncovering fraud in the Department of Labor's visa certification program now is the "fastest-growing area" of criminal investigations, according to the department's Office of Inspector General.

The investigators said the department's senior management should put "maintaining the integrity" of its guest worker programs at or near the top of its priority list.

But Alese Wooditch, who spent four years as an intelligence analyst with the Labor Department's Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations, said the department should try to limit fraud *before* it happens.

"We don't have any systematic prevention measures in place," Wooditch said. "The fact that we don't have a fraud prevention unit is of concern."

Faced with complaints from small business owners about backlogs in granting guest-worker visas, the Labor Department has opted to streamline the program to allow the department to issue the visas quickly.

Now it's taking the word of employers that proper documentation could be produced if the application were audited.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph E. DePadilla in Virginia recently told a judge that the new procedures will make catching criminals even more difficult.

"The H-2B program is very simple to defraud on a systemic level and the rule changes will make it even easier for the criminals," DePadilla said.

Under the new procedures, the Labor Department has given its Wage and Hour Division the authority to investigate problems in the H-2B program. But experts question whether Wage and Hour has the capacity or competence to protect low-wage workers, such as H-2B visa holders.

In March, the Government Accountability Office released a report of its undercover investigation of Wage and Hour, concluding that the division's procedures actually made workers *more* vulnerable to the kind of wage theft common in labor trafficking cases.

As part of its investigation, the GAO filed fictitious complaints with the division, including one that touched on one of the Labor Department's top enforcement priorities — protecting children from hazardous working conditions.

Undercover investigators told the division that children were operating heavy machinery, such as grinders and circular saws, at a California meatpacking plant during school hours.

Wage and Hour investigators never even recorded that they had received the tip, much less investigated it.

In their 2010 budget request to Congress, Wage and Hour administrators asked for an additional 288 staff members to, in part, improve enforcement for the H-2B program.

Any move toward stricter enforcement of the program would be an improvement, experts said.

Catherine K. Ruckelshaus, legal co-director of the National Employment Law Project, said it could hardly get worse.

"H-2B is being abused left and right and there's virtually no oversight over the program," Ruckels8haus said. "It's a perfect storm of no enforcement and that just perpetuates the practices."

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

After living in Postville, Iowa, through the sixth grade, Elisa Lopez returned with her family to San Jose Calderas, Guatemala, before the Agriprocessors raid in 2008. Her father had worked at the Iowa plant. She now has no school to attend in her small highland village. In this shed behind the family's home, water is heated over an open fire for bathing and washing.

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART THREE

Family link offers solace — and peril

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

Don't act like you know me. Please!

The middle-aged woman from Central America, who has been held hostage in a Southern California drop house for the last two years and eight months, is desperately trying to signal her niece.

Shhhhh, **she mouths.**

No one can know they're related. It will make life hell. If they find out, these kidnappers with guns, they may keep the aunt longer or the niece indefinitely. They may hurt or kill one of them. Already, the men have told the older woman she knows too much.

The niece doesn't understand at first — *why are you making funny faces?* — but she trusts her aunt. On this morning, with a new load of "chickens" roaming through the house, the women are convincingly unattached.

Later, the niece will be startled

SEE HOSTAGE | A8

by what her aunt tells her in stolen moments away from the men. About the extra fees. About the lack of freedom. About the abuse.

Up until today, the aunt had a clear conscience and a clear path out of this place. Work hard, cooking and cleaning, and pay off her debt to the traffickers $50 a week. But with only four months and $800 to go, her pretty, 26-year-old niece walked through the door and changed everything.

One day soon, the men will learn their secret, and it will spin their lives in directions they never imagined.

For now, the aunt worries.

What will happen to us?

▮▮▮

The young woman didn't come to the United States for herself. She came for her family.

In Central America, she thought life was pretty good. Her parents were poor but they had enough for food, clothing and to send her and her brothers to school.

They were all together, happy. And that was enough.

Then her father got sick. The doctors said he had the beginnings of prostate cancer. A school bus driver, he could no longer sit for long periods. He started missing work.

I have to help, she said to herself. *Help provide for my family.*

But jobs in Central America couldn't pay enough.

So the young woman, who had studied accounting at the local university for two years, planned her trip north. She used the same coyote her aunt did a couple of years before, unaware of what happened to her on the other side.

The first time she tried to cross into the United States, she got caught. And the second time. And a third. But during each trip through the Mexican desert, she thought of her parents. Of the help they needed.

She tried again and again and again.

On her seventh attempt, she made it.

She had no idea, though, that her aunt would be waiting for her in this house full of immigrants. Back home, they all figured she had reached America and taken that good job in Boston.

μμμ"

The niece is standing in a bedroom just like her aunt years before. There are guns in the room. Not surprisingly, she too was part of a "special trip" and more money is now required.

This time, it's $2,500.

She can't pay. Neither can her male friend in America who has already made a down payment for her.

She is young and attractive, the kind of woman these traffickers like to keep around the house. She makes the same deal as her aunt. She will work it off over time cooking and cleaning.

As the weeks pass, the women whisper comforting thoughts to each other in private. They talk about family and life back in Central America. *Was it really so bad?* They have questions without answers, and no one really to ask.

And things are about to take a dramatic turn.

Two months after she arrives, the niece gets pregnant. She tells her aunt but leaves out one dark secret.

She has been raped by one of the traffickers and continues to be assaulted. The baby is his.

By this time, it's becoming clear to the men that these women know each other. They share an obvious bond the others don't. They're both from the same town in Central America. And they're always close.

This new wrinkle worries the niece.

If her aunt knows she was raped, the men may think they need to kill her.

▮▮▮

The father of the niece's unborn child is determined. He wants to get rid of the baby. He threatens her often and this, more than anything they've seen in the house, terrorizes the women.

At one point, he tries to push the niece down the stairs of the two-story house. In the struggle, her aunt jumps in to protect her. She is viciously shocked on the back with a stun gun, but it is enough of a distraction to stop the attacker.

For the women, the baby is their whole world — innocent, a symbol of hope for the future.

But the man and his fellow traffickers have other plans. If they can't abort the child in her belly, then they'll murder both of them before the baby is born. They'll cut them up in pieces and dump them in the trash that's picked up every Tuesday.

No one will ever know you're dead, they say.

The clock is ticking.

Already, the niece is in her third trimester. And the women have no idea if they'll ever see this baby.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2009

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THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

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BUSINESS

JPMorgan site pick frustrates KC leaders

Company's move to Overland Park seen as a setback for downtown development.

By KEVIN COLLISON
The Kansas City Star

JPMorgan Retirement Plan Services is leaving south Kansas City and moving to Overland Park in 2011, taking 800 jobs to the Sprint Nextel campus.

The decision is another cross-border blow to Kansas City.

In October, the Kansas City Wizards and Cerner Corp. shifted to western Wyandotte County a soccer stadium and office development proposed for the former Bannister Mall.

A final deal with Kansas development officials is expected soon for the $414 million project at Village West, which would include 4,500 new Cerner jobs.

The JPMorgan relocation announced Tuesday will take with it a prestige company and the earnings tax paid by its em-

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MORE BUSINESS NEWS, A19
House votes to turn down the volume on TV commercials.

Missouri's food stamp error could be costly

Touted program has overstated enrollment, and millions in federal funds are in jeopardy.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | Victims are too often deported

ASK QUESTIONS LATER

Planes carrying illegal immigrants depart from this airfield in Harlingen, Texas, under the scrutiny of armed guards. This Immigration and Customs Enforcement flight returns the deportees to Guatemala. The U.S. Marshals Service also transfers illegal immigrants

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART FOUR

Armed men, just outside the door

The Star found numerous abuses of deportees on one of two Kansas City-based government airlines.

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala | In a dingy reception center across from the new terminal at La Aurora International Airport, Guatemalan immigration agents don surgical masks and brace for another day of controlled chaos.

A U.S. government passenger jet — one of up to seven a week — taxis to a stop. More than 100 disheveled deportees shuffle down the stairs and head for the center. Agents check for criminal re-

by the U.S. government before they send them here."

In fact, that's not the case.

Instead, The Kansas City Star found, the U.S. government compounds their suffering by deporting them back to the same impoverished conditions they fled in the first place. Up to one-fourth of the victims who might have testified against their traffickers were deported.

THE FOURTH OF A FIVE-PART SERIES

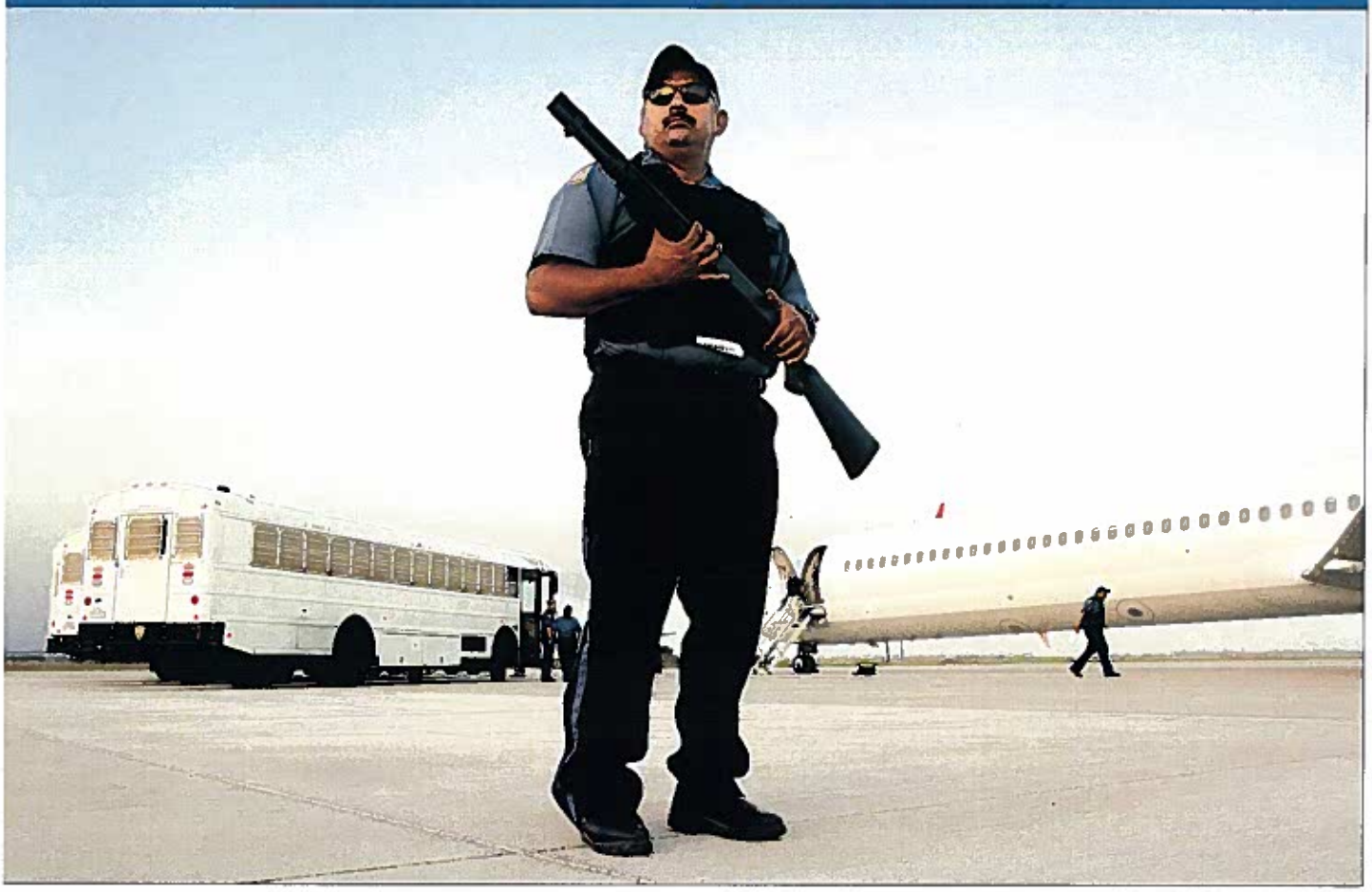
CASES: 'Classic examples of human trafficking victims'

DEPORTEES: Sedation of immigrants continues

HOSTAGE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | Victims are too often deported

ASK QUESTIONS LATER



KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Planes carrying illegal immigrants depart from this airfield in Harlingen, Texas, under the scrutiny of armed guards. This Immigration and Customs Enforcement flight returns the deportees to Guatemala. The U.S. Marshals Service also transfers illegal immigrants.

The Star found numerous abuses of deportees on one of two Kansas City-based government airlines.

By MIKE MCGRAW
The Kansas City Star

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala | In a dingy reception center across from the new terminal at La Aurora International Airport, Guatemalan immigration agents don surgical masks and brace for another day of controlled chaos.

A U.S. government passenger jet — one of up to seven a week — taxis to a stop. More than 100 disheveled deportees shuffle down the stairs and head for the center. Agents check for criminal records and swine flu and return shoelaces confiscated stateside, usually as a suicide precaution.

One thing the agents won't do, however, is check to see if the deportees were victims of human trafficking while on U.S. soil.

"We don't look at that," said a Guatemalan immigration agent. "That's done by the U.S. government before they send them here."

In fact, that's not the case.

Instead, The Kansas City Star found, the U.S. government compounds their suffering by deporting them back to the same impoverished conditions they fled in the first place. Up to one-fourth of the victims who might have testified against their traffickers were deported.

What's more, deportees on one of two Kansas City-based government airlines have been abused or sedated in violation of federal regulations, The Star found.

"These are very disturbing allegations and this is not permitted under our system," said Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a California

Democrat who heads the House subcommittee that oversees detention and deportation procedures. That is "completely at odds with our policy," she noted, adding that The Star's findings should be investigated.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials who charter the flights said they take great care to identify trafficking victims, but would not comment specifically on whether they screen all deportees for human trafficking status, or whether they are aware of deporting trafficking victims.

They said they have guidelines to prevent abuse of deportees, but they acknowledged that earlier this year at least one deportee was sedated on a Marshals Service flight in direct violation of those regulations.

Yet ICE said in a statement that it "takes allegations of trafficking very seriously and investigates any claims that a person makes to indicate they have been a victim of trafficking or trafficking-related crimes."

The State Department and Congress recognize the need for more aggressive screening to keep from deporting human trafficking victims, said Luis CdeBaca, the director of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

"We are going to be working ... to make sure those vulnerable populations are not just shown the door," he said.

Top officials, however, have known about the problem for years.

Trafficking expert Julianne Duncan, formerly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told federal officials in 2005 that trafficking victims — who are often forced into prostitution or hard labor — are "frequently deported rather than provided services. This is shockingly the case even for children."

That's allegedly what happened to Mardoqueo Valle-Callejas and many of the 388 workers swept up in a workplace raid last year at a Postville, Iowa, meat processing plant.

The Guatemalan father of five came to America illegally to earn money for his family. But he told The Star that he was forced to provide hours of free labor to his bosses, work when injured and that he had questionable fees deducted from his remaining earnings.

Iowa officials are also pursuing some 9,000 child labor law violations involving 32 young Guatemalan workers caught up in the same raid, some as young as 15. Some were illegally put to work at jobs that exposed them to dangerous chemicals at the Postville plant, according to a complaint by the Iowa attorney general.

"These are classic examples of human trafficking victims," said attorney Sonia Parras Konrad, who is representing many of those swept up in the raid. ICE never screened them for victim status, she said.

Had they been identified as human trafficking victims, they could have qualified for aid and ultimately may have been allowed to remain in the United States.

Instead, most were jailed for five months and then deported.

The Star's investigation also found more than 100 instances, most between 2007 and 2009, in which the government violated or tried to sidestep its own rules for the treatment of deportees on government flights carrying trafficking victims and other vulnerable detainees such as children, the mentally ill, the sick and the dying.

The findings are based on court documents and thousands of pages of reports released under the Freedom of Information Act.

In some cases deportees were boarded on four- to five-hour flights without needed medication. Some were boarded despite being too ill to fly, at times potentially exposing guards and other passengers to communicable diseases.

Medical problems aboard the flights clearly resulted at least in part from mismanaged health care inside U.S. immigration detention centers, according to a report released last week by Dora Schriro, a special adviser to ICE.

Schriro found that ICE often sent immigrants to detention centers before assessing their health needs, resulting in some not getting proper medical attention. She also said that ICE's "assessment, treatment, and management of pandemic and contagious diseases were inconsistent."

In addition, Schriro, a former Missouri prison official who now runs New York City's jails, said, "Medical summaries were not always provided when detainees were transferred."

Other deportees were harassed or denied permission to use lavatories on the planes, causing some to soil their clothing. Some deportees — chained at the wrists, ankles and waist — also were sedated with dangerous drugs, even after federal officials promised to discontinue the practice.

And that represents only the cases guards and nurses actually documented.

Many others may have gone unreported, some guards said, because of an unspoken rule that "what happens on the plane stays on the plane."

Deportation frenzy

During his presidential campaign, Barack Obama said it was unrealistic to believe the United States could deport all of the 12 million illegal immigrants estimated to be living in America.

"We are not going to send them home," Obama said.

But the government seems to be trying. For the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, the United States deported 387,790 illegal immigrants — the seventh consecutive record for deportations.

At some point most of them were passengers on one of two government "airlines" headquartered in Kansas City, one operated by ICE and the other by the U.S. Marshals Service.

A few deportees are criminals, but most are what ICE calls "non-criminal" immigrants who entered the United States illegally. Most are from Mexico and nearly all came to find higher-paying jobs.

Some also are human trafficking victims, according to a report last year funded by the Justice Department.

"People definitely get deported who shouldn't be deported," said Nancy Morawetz, a professor at New York University School of Law and an expert on deportation law.

In fact, the United States has mistakenly been deporting its own citizens, including 31 specific cases recently documented by Jacqueline Stevens, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

One was Mark Lyttle, a cognitively disabled man who was born in North Carolina, but deported to Mexico even though he speaks no Spanish and has no Mexican heritage.

Lyttle was chained and boarded onto a U.S. Marshals Service plane late last year, flown to a staging area in Texas, and ordered to walk across the border.

Lyttle's strange odyssey began after he served jail time for inappropriately touching an employee at a group home where he lived. A jail form showed his birthplace as Mexico, and he gave ICE conflicting statements.

Stevens, who has studied the federal file on Lyttle, said records ICE checked showed Lyttle was born in the United States and was a U.S. citizen, but that ICE agents "falsely swore to the contrary."

Lyttle finally made it home in April this year, after he persuaded a consular officer in the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala to contact his family. ICE did not respond to a request for comment.

Federal auditors documented numerous weaknesses in ICE's "alien removal decision making" process, especially during large workplace raids such as the one in Iowa. The

problems included a failure to identify "humanitarian issues," such as child welfare and medical problems.

It's little wonder then, critics contend, that human trafficking victims sometimes get deported.

Agents should be required to screen for such victims after all workplace raids, said Leslye Orloff, director of the Immigrant Women Program, Legal Momentum.

"If we take the Postville case, we know there were at least some women who were picked up in the raid and later deported that may well have been crime victims," Orloff said.

While ICE officials acknowledged they were told of substandard working conditions and inadequate pay at Postville, they said no one claimed to be a human trafficking victim.

But victims are often reluctant to step forward, experts said, especially during raids such as the one in Postville.

"We ask other countries to make sure they are not deporting human trafficking victims," said Mark Lagon, former director of the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. "But there's every reason to think that we have deported them, too."

Shroud of secrecy

An ICE public affairs officer accompanied a Star reporter and photographer on one deportation flight in August from San Antonio to Guatemala City.

Deportees on the flight were "non-criminal" illegal immigrants, and none were in chains. Conditions mirrored those on other flights, said Pat Reilly, an ICE spokeswoman. But documents, lawsuits and interviews with deportees, nurses and guards paint a different picture when the media isn't around — especially on ICE's partner airline run by the U.S. Marshals Service.

Deportations and transfers occur under a shroud of secrecy, often after detainees have been locked up for weeks or months.

Because of space limitations in some detention centers, many are repeatedly transferred by ICE or Marshals Service planes in what one recent report described as a game of musical chairs.

"The transfers are devastating, absolutely devastating," immigration attorney Rebecca Kitson told Human Rights Watch for a recent report on the transfers.

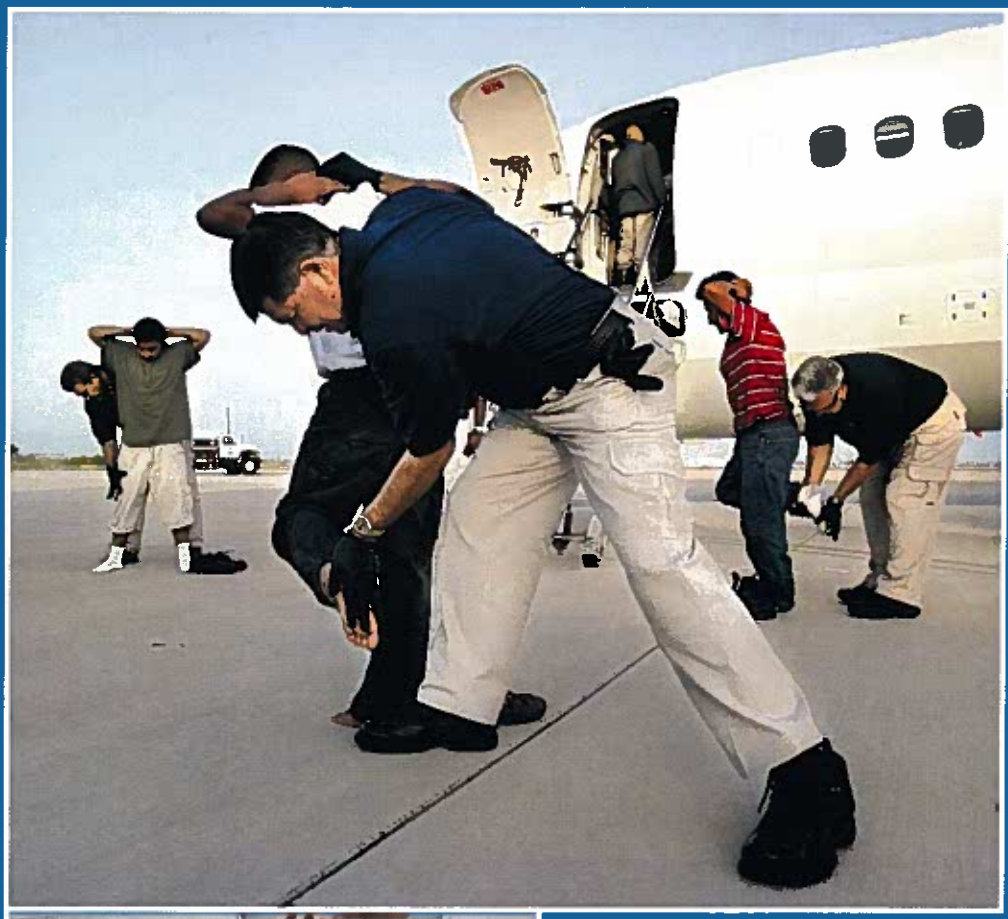
Kitson said detainees "are loaded onto a plane in the middle of the night. They have no idea where they are, no idea what state they are in. I cannot overemphasize the psychological trauma to these people."

The transfers also severely disrupt the attorney-client relationship, said Human Rights Watch, "because attorneys are rarely, if ever, informed of their clients' transfers."

ICE said the process is designed to reduce security risks.

But records show that some of those transferred and deported on the planes have been subjected to inhumane treatment and physical abuse on the trip, even those who were shackled.

As recently as last year Dianna McChargue, a Marshals Service supervisor, said in a sworn statement that she told



This Immigration and Customs Enforcement plane at Harlingen, Texas, will take captured illegal immigrants back to Guatemala. Before boarding the plane, deportees are searched one last time. When the deportees arrive in Guatemala City, their personal belongings — contained in small plastic bags — are returned to them, this time by Marta Munoz. The processing is done at an airport there.

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

After their arrival in Guatemala City, deportees walk to a processing center. Guatemalan authorities rely on the Americans to check whether any deportees might have been human trafficking victims.

her bosses that some guards on the flights were sexist and racist toward fellow guards and others, but that they ignored her warnings.

A few years earlier, McChargue admonished guards for discouraging deportees from "defecating during lavatory call" because of "unpleasant odors." She ordered them to stop preventing deportees from using lavatories in any way they needed.

The Marshals acknowledged "isolated cases" where deportees were denied permission to use lavatories during flights but added, "We can assure you these incidents have been addressed."

Internal documents show ICE and the Marshals Service continue to disagree on how deportees should be treated on the flights.

In fact, the Marshals refused a request from ICE this summer to stop carrying stun guns, sedating passengers and restraining females and juveniles on the flights it operates for ICE.

The Marshals cited security concerns, adding that deportees are clearly in Marshal custody during those flights. ICE insists, however, that deportees remain in ICE custody, even while on Marshals Service planes.

Pre-flight cocktails

From 2003 to 2007, numerous deportees were injected with "pre-flight cocktails" before their flight home, according to congressional testimony.

The main ingredient: Haldol, a potent antipsychotic that can cause death. In some cases, sedated deportees needed wheelchairs to get off the plane.

The practice became so controversial that ICE ordered it stopped and said it would no longer involuntarily sedate immigrants without a court order. "There are no exceptions to this policy," an ICE memo said at the time.

But The Star found that the practice never really stopped, at least for detainees on Marshals Service flights operated as ICE charters.

☒ Records show the Marshals Service in May forcibly injected a Jamaican detainee with Haldol — even after he had been moved to the back of the plane and was no longer disruptive.

Ashim Mitra, a pharmacy professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, called it a clear violation of ICE policies and an overreaction that risked harming the patient.

ICE told The Star it learned of the incident after the fact and sent the Marshals a memo asking them to stop. The Marshals said that they are aware of the memo, but that the action was called for under their own policies, and they don't intend to make changes.

Incident reports obtained by the newspaper also show that ICE boarded or tried to board detainees who were too physically or mentally ill, or too far along in their pregnancy to travel under ICE's own guidelines.

The reports also showed that ICE often failed to provide nurses on Marshals Service flights with required medical records for deportees, and that seriously ill deportees were sometimes boarded without their medications.

"It was unbelievable the condition some of these people were in when they arrived," said Nina Siulc, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, who interviewed several thousand Dominican deportees within minutes of their arrival there.

Scott Allen, a doctor with Physicians for Human Rights, said, "The documents I reviewed show multiple cases involving pressure on flight nurses to board improperly screened patients, or patients without proper medical documentation. This is simply bad

practice."

Neither the Marshals Service nor ICE responded directly to the allegations in the reports, but both said they have guidelines to prevent such incidents.

Court documents show some deportees also have been harassed and threatened aboard the planes.

Marshals Service guard Fernando DaCosta held a switchblade knife in the face of a young Mexican deportee on one flight and threatened to cut his throat if he didn't give DaCosta his correct name, according to allegations in a federal anti-discrimination lawsuit.

The Marshals suspended DaCosta for two weeks in 2006 for "obscene and derogatory language" directed toward fellow workers and others, and "conduct unbecoming an aviation enforcement officer."

ICE and the Marshals Service refused to comment about DaCosta, calling it a personnel matter. DaCosta, who is no longer with the Marshals Service, said the incident "never happened."

The Star also found that guards, deportees and others potentially have been exposed to communicable diseases such as tuberculosis because ICE failed to follow its own screening criteria. On several occasions, records show ICE agents attempted to board detainees despite what a nurse called "grossly positive" TB skin tests.

ICE insists all deportees are carefully screened and that deportees who test positive for TB are not sent home if they are contagious.

But in May 2003, in what federal auditors later called "an extreme case of failed medical screening," a Marshals Service crew was ordered to board a female detainee who met the plane in Chicago.

She and two ICE agents wore surgical masks and protective clothing, and she showed symptoms of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome.

Top Marshals Service officials in Kansas City ordered the woman boarded over objections from the nurse and the rest of the crew. The incident sparked a mutiny, and the crew refused to continue the mission.

She was later transported on a commercial airliner filled with passengers.

Valle-Callejas' journey

Advocates for detainees rounded up in the 2008 workplace raid in Postville said a lack of proper screening by ICE also led to the deportation of potential human trafficking victims.

They included Valle-Callejas, who was deported on one of the flights to Guatemala City.

With his family gathered around in his impoverished village of Calderas, Valle-Callejas told the story of his ill-fated trek to America.

After putting up his house for a loan to smugglers, he was shuttled across the U.S. border illegally and traveled north looking for work. He said he ended up in a job where his illegal status was held over his head.

"I worked 86 hours a week and never got paid for more than 60," he recalled. "If we complained, they would take the job away, and this was the only job available."

After his arrest, U.S. authorities gave Valle-Callejas and the others a choice. Plead guilty to illegal entry and identity theft and spend five months in prison before being deported, or plead not guilty and face up to two years in prison.

Valle-Callejas and most of the others took the deal.

While Valle-Callejas was in jail he lost his house in Guatemala, and now he and his family are homeless.

"I came back feeling desolate for the way they treated us," he said.

Were they human trafficking victims as their advocates insist? No one knows, because they allegedly were never properly screened.

But once they were back home, some told Guatemalan officials they were exploited or abused and felt they were victims of forced labor, said Antonio Escobedo, director general of consular and migratory affairs in Guatemala City.

"There was absolutely no consideration of whether they were victims of trafficking, exploitation or child labor," said Erik Camayd-Freixas, who served as a translator for the U.S. government after the Postville raid. "They all got the same raw deal."

Still, many come back for more.

A Salvadoran who would only give his first name as Raoul said he already had been deported once. But this summer he was leaving a migrant shelter near the Guatemalan border in an effort to sneak back into the United States.

"In El Salvador I make $3 a day from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.," Raoul told The Star as he prepared to ride a makeshift raft across the Suchiate River that divides Guatemala from Mexico.

Despite the risks of being deported again, Raoul said it's worth it.

"People in the U.S. should know that we suffer on the way. We know the risks, and we know we broke the laws in the U.S. But that is better than what we have here."

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART FOUR

Armed men, just outside the door

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

It's 6:30 a.m. at the two-story drop house in Southern California, and men with guns are quietly circling outside.

The middle-aged woman from Central America — who came here looking for a better life but was enslaved in a human trafficking ring — is in the kitchen making coffee for her pregnant niece.

There is one last moment of silence in this dreaded place ... and then, boom!

Within seconds, men are bursting through the front door and running from room to room, barking orders at sleepy-eyed immigrants. You can hear women screaming, children crying.

It's like a movie.

For some reason, the aunt thinks this as

SEE HOSTAGE | A14

the door comes down — the same door through which hundreds of victims have passed the last few years.

In their uniforms, with shielded masks over their faces, the men make their way to the kitchen. The aunt instinctively raises her hands in surrender. To whom she's surrendering she doesn't know.

This is a raid.

■■■

Upstairs, men, women and children sleep piled on the floor. So many bodies that arms and legs overlap. Some people sit up as they sleep, just so more bodies can fit latticed across a dirty carpet.

A total of 60 immigrants are in the house. All controlled by the traffickers.

The niece is getting up as she hears the commotion downstairs.

La migra, she thinks. Immigration.

But at this point, eight months pregnant, she doesn't care.

Just get us out of here.

After 10 months in this house, she doesn't care if she's sent back to Central America. She just wants to be free again. Anywhere.

Amid the tumult, a Spanish-speaking man walks through the house trying to calm everyone.

Don't worry, relax, he tells them in Spanish. *What we are doing is to help you guys out.*

For many of the immigrants, this next part — where federal agents question them and sift traffickers from possible victims — is almost as scary as what they've already gone through.

Traffickers warned them about this day. Their words still resonate:

If you ever speak, we'll catch you.

We know your family, we know where they live, they will pay the consequences.

They will send you back. We know people at immigration.

So many of them stay silent. Can they trust these uniformed agents? These men with guns telling them what to do? In their home countries, police are often part of the corruption.

Scared and confused, they can't know that the raid is part of a three-year human smuggling investigation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Authorities will soon have three of the traffickers under arrest.

■■■

The aunt? No problem, she's ready to talk. She's already given up so much, what more could she lose?

But the decision is not so easy for the niece, her story harder to tell.

The rape. The shame. She still hasn't told her aunt about these things. And she's thinking about the uncertain future she and her baby face. She just needs to think.

Her aunt is back in the kitchen, restless.

I'm hungry, she tells agents.

And there, in the same place where she cooked and cleaned for others, followed orders from men who stank and drank and did drugs, she serves herself breakfast.

First a glass of milk.

And then, without even thinking, she grabs the pan dulce, the sugary Mexican sweet bread that has been reserved for the traffickers.

On this morning, she takes a bite.

Because she can. Because, for the moment, she's free.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2009

KANSAS CITY EDITION WWW.KANSASCITY.COM THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2009

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

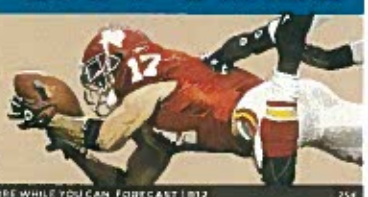
FYI WEEKEND PREVIEW

So much music, so many choices ... Check out our picks for the top 20 albums and top 25 live shows of 2009.

SPORTS DAILY

Don't expect to see many completed passes when the Chiefs take on the Browns on Sunday at Arrowhead. The teams rank first and second for most dropped passes.

■ KU releases Mangino settlement details. | B1



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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | Government promises action

CHANGING VIEWS

Many immigrants enter the United States through the border fence with Mexico. At the fence on the beach at Tijuana, Mexico, this man said he was waiting for an opportunity to enter the U.S. — something he said he'd previously done, but been deported.

Solving the problem will take renewed efforts of lawmakers, agencies and law enforcement — and public pressure, too.

By MARK MORRIS, MIKE MCGRAW and LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

Go to KansasCity.com to read the full series and additional perspectives on how to solve the problem, including more stories and a video interview with the reporters.

The Obama administration is weeks away from announcing a new surge — this one aimed at escalating the war on human trafficking in America.

"In January we are going to be announcing a major set of initiatives," Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, told The Kansas City Star.

Napolitano disclosed the administration's plans at the conclusion of The Star's six-month investigation exposing inaction, which has reached out to them and asked what changes are needed, will correct structural flaws in the broken system.

"It is time to go back to the drawing board and promote a more seamless, coordinated plan," said Florrie Burke, a nationally known advocate for

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART FIVE

'I share my liberty with my son'

BUSINESS

U.S. Bank's good news: 1,100 jobs for area

It intends to begin operations at Overland Park location in the spring. Total payroll estimated at $50 million.

By KEVIN COLLISON
The Kansas City Star

U.S. Bank is providing early holiday cheer to local job seekers, announcing this morning it plans to open a service center in Overland Park and hire 1,100 new workers.

Mark Jorgenson, regional president and CEO, said the new U.S. Bank Service Center would be one of the largest operated by the bank, and has been in the works for more than two years.

"I can't think of a better time to make the announcement than over the holiday season," Jorgenson said. "It's a triumphs package of the best kind, being a private one. It's also a positive statement for U.S. Bank."

MORE BUSINESS NEWS, A16
Demand for gasoline up as more people plan holiday travel.

The bank hopes to begin operations this spring in the center at 12800 Foster St. About 150 U.S. Bank employees at an aviation credit card operation in Overland Park also are to be relocated to the new facility, bringing the total work force to about 1,300 people. It will take about four years before the center is fully staffed, bank officials said.

The U.S. Bank decision is the second major jobs announcement this week for Overland Park.

EE U.S. BANK | A18

Astronomers seeing hope on hot planet

The search is on for a celestial body that would be able to sustain life.

By DENNIS OVERBYE

ORDEAL Women tell their story in hopes of assisting others

Experts offer ideas to address trafficking

SOLUTIONS: Ineffective policies need overhaul

INITIATIVES: More prosecutors, training proposed

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA | Government promises action

CHANGING VIEWS

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

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"In January we are going to be announcing a major set of initiatives," Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, told The Kansas City Star.

Napolitano disclosed the administration's plans at the conclusion of The Star's six-month investigation exposing numerous failures in America's anti-trafficking battle.

Although details of the plan were not released, advocates and other experts said they're cautiously optimistic that this is the best chance in years to address many of the problems revealed in the newspaper's five-part series. They're also hopeful that the administration, which has reached out to them and asked what changes are needed, will correct structural flaws in the broken system.

"It is time to go back to the drawing board and promote a more seamless, coordinated plan," said Florrie Burke, a nationally known advocate for trafficking victims.

Other experts said it's also time for congressional oversight hearings on the flagging decade-long struggle, and time to centralize an anti-trafficking effort that is thinly spread across a vast bureaucracy plagued by inter-agency wrangling

and a lack of coordination.

Others contend what's also needed is a top-to-bottom overhaul of ineffective immigration policies that infuriate those on both sides of the politically charged debate.

"The series that ran this week in The Star is a horrible reminder of the price of codes without compassion or common sense," said U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a Kansas City Democrat. "In our quest to make our borders unbreakable and our laws unforgiving we have driven some of the most poor and desperate seeking the promise of America into unthinkable situations."

Kansas state Rep. Mike Slattery, a Mission Democrat, said reading the series convinced him that changes across the system are desperately needed.

"It has been on people's radar on the federal level," Slattery said. "Yet there seems to be no coordinated effort to make things better...I think it's about making this a priority."

The series also sparked a grassroots response that many argue is key to regaining America's moral authority to preach the human trafficking doctrine around the world.

One Kansas City area man contacted The Star wanting to know how to help a human trafficking victim he knows. One area woman said she planned to approach her Lenexa pastor to see if area churches could create a safe house for sex trafficked women.

A local small-business owner wanted to know how to find out if the personnel service she uses employs legal immigrants and treats employees properly. Others planned to call Congress and request better oversight of trafficking and more money funneled into the effort.

"It is hidden, ignored, denied, shuffled around and overlooked at the expense of thousands of lives," said Jane Mailand of Lincoln, Neb. "I was so sad to find out that the Midwest is right in the middle of this huge human tragedy."

Experts told The Star that the federal government needs to concentrate on core issues, such as reaching a consensus on how to define human trafficking. They include:

µLaunching initiatives to find more victims. Better trained police officers and public information campaigns need to be aimed at new arrivals and U.S. citizens.

µAppropriating money for services Congress promised years ago for American-born victims. Most are girls — some as young as 12 — sex trafficked in the United States.

µEliminating fraud in work visa programs that make trafficking easier.

µScreening for victims before they arrive in the United States or are swept up in workplace raids and deported.

µAvoiding built-in conflicts for officers who are now responsible for both arresting illegal immigrants and identifying victims.

Advocates concede that, even with such changes, it will be a long fight.

"If you want to change the direction of a goldfish, that's pretty easy," said Bill Bernstein, deputy director of Mosaic Family Services in Dallas, which works with victims. "If you want to change the direction of a whale, it takes a lot of water. And it takes time."

Training and awareness

Top anti-trafficking officials agree that more law enforcement training to identify and respond to human trafficking is critical.

A police officer, state trooper or federal agent who focuses on a crime such as prostitution — without asking how the person in the back seat of the patrol car got there — could be missing a much larger offense.

While training was a focus of the Bush administration, experts said that it should be broader and become a standard part of the law enforcement curriculum for every officer in a position to encounter human trafficking.

Napolitano suggested that her initiative could take such an approach.

"The problem is it is a very difficult crime to find," she said. "We are revisiting how law enforcement officers are trained to detect human trafficking at the federal, state and local levels."

Janet Napolitano

Many survivors of human trafficking said they didn't know there are laws in the United States against what they experienced.

They didn't have a clue that they have rights in America.

"So many people with relatives being held hostage and sold don't feel comfortable coming forward," said Rocio Gonzalez Watson, a victim's advocate. "They think they are going to get in trouble. If people feel they're not going to be punished for telling the truth, they will open up."

That's why education is vital, according to advocates. They're calling for educational programs in countries that are a source of U.S.-bound trafficking victims, such as Mexico, China and Guatemala.

"If you come from a country where people make 10 cents an hour or $1 an hour, you may think a few dollars an hour is good. Under the laws of the U.S., you must be paid at least the minimum wage regardless of where you come from or what your immigration status is," said Ivy Suriyopas, staff attorney for the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

"They also need to know that here in the U.S., they're not required to work 80 hours or 100 hours a week. If they do work such hours, they are entitled to receive the appropriate overtime pay."

Also needed is a campaign to educate immigrants and their families that U.S. law enforcement will help them and that authorities aren't corrupt like in some countries where they protect the trafficking ring.

Eliminating a built-in conflict for law enforcement authorities who must sort out illegal immigrants from trafficking victims is another challenge.

Although federal immigration officials maintain that their agents are trained to identify human trafficking victims, advocates such as Sonia Parras Konrad noted there is an "inherent conflict of interest" when the same officers searching for illegal immigrants are also trying to identify trafficking victims.

Visa fraud, improved screening

The Star's investigation found that the U.S. Department of Labor had returned $200 million it was supposed to use to detect fraud in the nation's work visa program.

☒ Last Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives finally passed a measure giving the Labor Department authority to spend that money. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law Wednesday.

The bill also adds more money for combating human trafficking, including some services for American-born victims. But more needs to be done to prevent traffickers from misusing the visa program, experts say.

Laura Abel, deputy director of the Justice Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, said guest workers should have more freedom to legally change jobs. "If the employer says work for pennies a day and sleep in this pigpen, they have to. They have no negotiating power," Abel noted.

Catherine Ruckelshaus, legal co-director of the National Employment Law Project, suggested allowing H-2B visa holders access to the same kind of federally funded legal services to which migrant farm workers are entitled.

Other experts suggest cracking down on businesses, such as national hotel chains, that profit by contracting with unscrupulous labor brokers who exploit vulnerable guest workers.

Topeka criminal defense lawyer Pedro Irigonegaray said investigators should look

at large companies that create the economic incentive for human trafficking.

"When was the last time you saw the head of a large hotel corporation or a large manufacturing company or one of these plants where undocumented workers are made to work ... go to prison?" he asked.

As for improved screening and public education, Napolitano said, those should be part of the Obama administration's new initiatives.

"We want to go at the whole deal, about people making money off of other people's miseries, with particular focus on child sex exploitation," she said.

"We had the Hidden in Plain Sight campaign, designed to alert the public and local law enforcement about victims of human trafficking. And we are going to increase our efforts there ... We are going to be doing some things at the border itself, where victims may be brought across."

Focus on sex trafficking

Young American-born girls can't be forgotten in the war against human trafficking, say experts and advocates who work with domestic sex trafficking victims.

First, fund services for victims, something advocates say lawmakers should have done four years ago. Then, create safe houses and shelters where authorities can take girls who were forced into prostitution.

Many girls are currently put in jail.

"We must have a secure environment where they can stay safe," said Linda Smith, founder of Shared Hope International, which rescues victims of sex trafficking. "... We have to protect that child."

Studies show that as many as 100,000 American-born girls are sex trafficked each year, Smith said. That compares with an estimated 17,500 foreign-born victims trafficked into the United States each year. Yet most federal grant dollars go toward international victims.

"Why in heaven's name isn't 90 percent of the money going to our girls?" Smith said.

The United States needs to make a concerted effort to reduce the demand for sex trafficking, said Laura Lederer, a former senior adviser on human trafficking at the U.S. Department of State. The country needs programs targeted at arresting and prosecuting not only the pimps and traffickers, but also those buying sex.

Through her new organization, Global Centurion, Lederer reviewed innovative programs aimed at reducing demand. Good examples, she said, are the "Dear John" campaign in Atlanta, and the First Offender Prostitution Program in San Francisco, which diverts those who buy sex into a weekend program about the harm of human trafficking.

"Yes, it's important to have shelters and fund services," Lederer said. "But it's also important to turn off the spigot, turn off the flow."

"It's that man out there buying the sex," she said. "He's creating a market for this."

Prosecution and commitment

While prosecutions in trafficking cases are increasing, the United States still convicts relatively few traffickers.

"I think we have to understand the difficulties here," Napolitano said. "It's not as if victims are coming forward saying, 'I am a victim of a crime.' They don't come to the attention of law enforcement."

In its latest budget request to Congress, the Justice Department asked for money to almost double the number of human trafficking prosecutors.

Yet as the Obama administration prepares to roll out its new anti-trafficking initiatives, politics could cloud the issue.

Administration officials maintain that under President George W. Bush, the Justice Department overemphasized human trafficking prosecutions and shortchanged traditional civil rights cases, such as vote fraud and race discrimination.

Former Bush officials counter that Obama's Justice Department will end up de-emphasizing human trafficking in its zeal to re-emphasize more traditional civil rights cases.

Whatever the new administration proposes, there is guarded optimism among advocates that progress is possible, even in Washington's politically charged atmosphere.

Recent history has shown that the depravity of modern human slavery — universally decried as a scourge on civilized society — has made strange bedfellows of a wide range of political and social activists.

When Congress passed America's landmark Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000, the sponsors could not have been more different: Kansas Republican Sam Brownback, a stalwart social conservative, and the late Minnesota Democrat Paul Wellstone, one of the leading liberal voices in the party.

Brownback said that he and Wellstone found broad support for the law by avoiding politically sensitive minefields that could have derailed the entire effort. Progress on human trafficking can be made, they discovered, when it isn't tied to the incendiary issue of illegal immigration.

For example, some lawmakers became suspicious that the plan to create a special visa for human trafficking victims was just a back-door way to expand immigration. Brownback defused that, in part, by linking the visa to cooperation with law enforcement in prosecuting traffickers.

Experts insist that whatever progress is made in the United States will be limited until lawmakers — and the American public — finally accept that human trafficking is but one dimension of illegal migration.

HOSTAGE HOUSE | PART FIVE

'I share my liberty with my son'

By LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

She fiddles with her cell phone. In midconversation, she holds it out, showing off who's on the screen.

"Here's my son," she says, pronouncing those three words in perfect English.

A wide-eyed toddler smiles, an oversized hat on his head. Mom leans over to see the photo herself, not able to pass up one more look.

Two and a half years after she was smuggled into America and then held hostage at a drop house where she was raped, forced to work for no pay and constantly abused, this young woman from Central America is transforming herself. So is her aunt.

They're human trafficking survivors, not victims. There's a difference.

SEE ORDEAL | A12

Every day now is about hope and healing and grabbing hold of that American dream they chased through the Mexican desert.

Finally, they can see it.

"We thank God for this," the aunt says.

■■■

The day of the raid, the two women didn't know what would happen to them.

Would they be deported? Treated as criminals?

Would anyone believe what they went through?

So many of the 60 immigrants who were crammed into that single family home in Southern California refused to talk. They didn't trust law enforcement. Some just wanted to go home.

Because of that, three-fourths of the immigrants were sent back to their countries. It isn't clear if they were deported or went back on their own.

The aunt says 16 cooperated, including her and her niece. They were certified as victims and received benefits available for those who suffer severe abuse by human traffickers.

They were given food, housing, clothing and work permits. Once they get a special visa for trafficking victims, they can stay in America for three years before they can apply for permanent residency.

The two women got their work permits six months ago and are now legally employed.

The day after the raid, they arrived at a shelter where workers seem just as invested in their future as the women. They got weekly therapy, job training and the chance to commiserate with other survivors.

It's what the U.S. system designed to protect human trafficking victims is supposed to do: Identify the victims. Help them. Heal them.

They now live the life they first heard about in Central America.

They save 30 percent of everything they make. The niece finally sends money home, where her father's illness has gotten worse.

"My parents are very happy," she says. "They say, 'God bless you for doing what you are doing for us.'."

The two women and the little boy live together in a transitional apartment as they plot new courses.

The aunt now works at a college. After years of serving as a modern-day slave for human traffickers, she has her favorite programs: cooking shows.

The niece is taking classes to learn English. She spends most of her time with her 1½-year-old son, whose trafficker father never wanted him to live. Mom and son play on the floor together and watch "Sesame Street." The father's whereabouts are unknown.

■■■

When they do talk about what happened, which isn't often, they never focus on the pain. They say:

Look where we were and look where we are now.

Yet sometimes fear and the awful images sneak in.

The aunt has dreams about the men who trafficked them. She'll wake up in the morning, shaken, and tell her niece about nightmares that seem too real.

"I dreamed they took the baby away from us," she tells her.

More than a month ago, the aunt took him to get his immunization shots. She pushed him in a stroller on a nice fall afternoon.

When a stranger snatched her purse and ran off, she panicked.

Were they coming after the boy? she wondered. No, but the incident brought it all back.

No doubt the women are still afraid. Six or seven of their traffickers are still out there.

Sometimes they'll just walk around the shelter, careful not to venture too far away.

Close to safety, but still free.

"I share my liberty with my son," the niece says.

They tell their story, hoping that other victims of human trafficking know that there is a better life once they're rescued. The United States intended for people like them — people who came here illegally but ended up horribly abused on American soil — to be able to rebuild their lives here.

In a country that believes in human rights.

"If more information is given out," the niece says through a translator, her aunt nodding in agreement as she talks, "people will realize the help they can get, and fewer people would stay quiet.

"People would come forward."

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

SUPPLEMENTAL

COMING TO AMERICA

Human trafficking occurs in and within all continents, save Antarctica. The U.S. began fighting it in earnest in 2000. The first decade of the fight has brought the issue here into clearer focus.

HEAVY TRAFFIC

Economic opportunity in the U.S. draws human trafficking victims from all over the world. Estimates on the number of victims have varied from 17,500 a year now to 50,000 annually earlier this decade; nobody really knows. International victims are smuggled across borders or can enter legally and fall into slavery.

Orange arrows show what countries or regions are providing the most victims for traffickers.

WHICH COUNTRIES ARE IN COMPLIANCE?

- Countries that fully comply with minimum standards set out in U.S. law.
- Countries that do not fully comply with the minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance.
- Countries that are making significant efforts, but have large numbers of trafficking victims, provided no evidence of increased anti-trafficking efforts over the last year or still need to take additional steps in the coming year to meet their commitments.
- Countries that do not fully comply with the standards and are making no efforts to do so.
- The State Department also lists Haiti and Somalia as "special cases" because those countries have weak to nonexistent central governments.

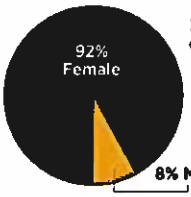
NOTE: The U.S. has not rated itself by the same standard that it uses to rate other nations. Next June, the U.S. will rate itself by that standard.

Sources: U.S. State Department, The Protection Project

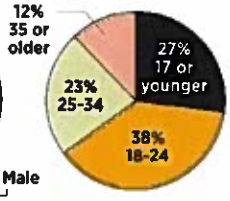
Graphics by DAVE EAMES and MARK MORRIS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

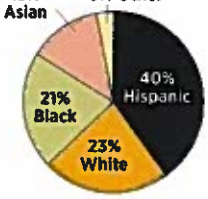
GENDER



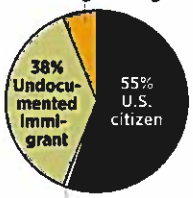
AGE RANGE



ETHNIC ORIGINS



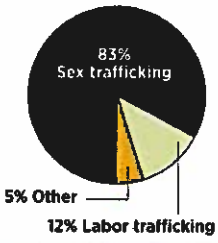
CITIZENSHIP



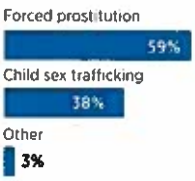
Note: Data for age, ethnic origins and citizenship were not reported for about half the reported victims.

THE WORK OF SLAVERY

HOW USED



SEX TRAFFICKING



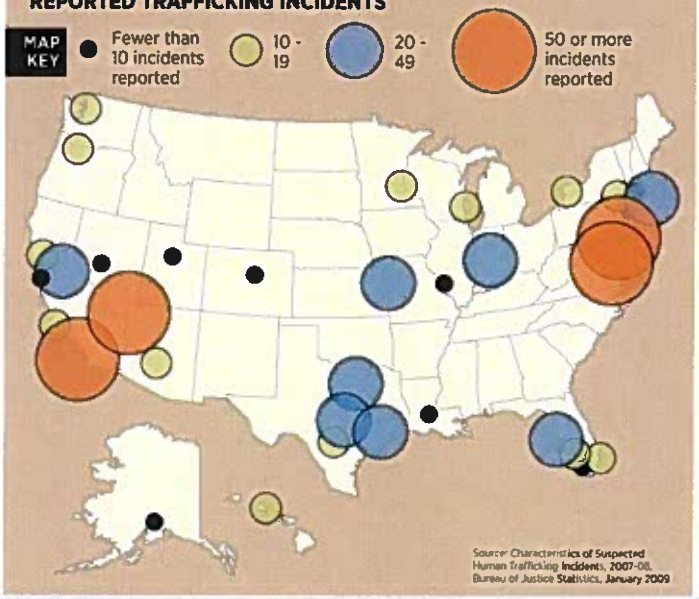
Source: Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2007-08, Bureau of Justice Statistics, January 2009

WHERE TRAFFICKING HAPPENS

Incidents of human trafficking are studied most closely around the country's 42 federally funded task forces. As this map illustrates, many are clustered in coastal or border areas, leaving large swaths of the country ill-equipped to find victims, critics note. California's Bay Area has three in close proximity. One task force in Dallas sits next to another in Fort Worth. But there are none in much of the Midwest or New Mexico, despite requests from officials there.

TASK FORCE LOCATIONS

REPORTED TRAFFICKING INCIDENTS



Source: Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2007-08, Bureau of Justice Statistics, January 2009

DEFINING ENSLAVEMENT

Human trafficking, at its root, is an economic crime. Here are some of the methods that slavers have used to keep their victims in bondage.

Contract slavery
A worker is deceived through the use of a false labor contract. The trafficker can use the contract to avoid criminal charges by "proving" that a debt is owed.

Debt bondage
The victim and his work are held as collateral against a loan. Unable to earn independently, the victim passes debt to the next generation, creating hereditary enslavement.

Indentured servitude
The worker contracts with an employer for a specified period and, in exchange, receives food, clothing, transportation and lodging.

Forced labor
Work coerced through threats, harm, restraint, abuse of the legal system or through confiscation of a worker's identification documents.

Peonage
Enforced service in which the victim is restrained of liberty and compelled to work against her will to satisfy a debt. In this situation, the slave may see no alternative because of the master's use of legal coercion.

Source: Free the Slaves, Black's Law Dictionary, U.S. Department of Justice

RED FLAGS AND WARNING SIGNS

The watchword of investigators who probe human trafficking is "look deeper." The Polaris Project, one of the largest anti-trafficking organizations in the U.S., says these indicators can suggest that someone is a human trafficking victim:

AT WORK OR AT HOME

The individual:
- Is not free to come or go as she pleases
- Is under 18 and is committing commercial sex acts
- Is unpaid, paid very little, or paid only through tips
- Works excessively long or unusual hours
- Is not allowed breaks or works under unusual restrictions at work
- Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- Was recruited using false promises about working conditions
- Is subject to high security measures at work or home, such as opaque or boarded up windows, bars on windows, barbed wire, or security cameras

BEHAVIOR

- Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, nervous or paranoid
- Exhibits unusually fearful or anxious behavior about "law enforcement"
- Avoids eye contact

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Lacks health care
- Appears malnourished
- Shows signs of physical and sexual abuse, confinement or torture

LACK OF CONTROL

- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not in control of her own money – no financial records or bank account
- Is not in control of his own identification documents
- Is not allowed to speak for himself or herself. (A third party may insist on being present.)

OTHER

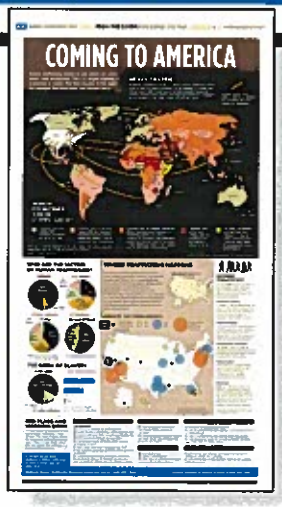
- Claims to be "just visiting" and unable to clarify her address or where she is staying
- Lacks knowledge of whereabouts, such as not knowing what city he is in

Source: Polaris Project

If you believe you have evidence of human trafficking or know a victim, you can report it to:

National Human Trafficking Resource Center hot line at 1-888-373-7888

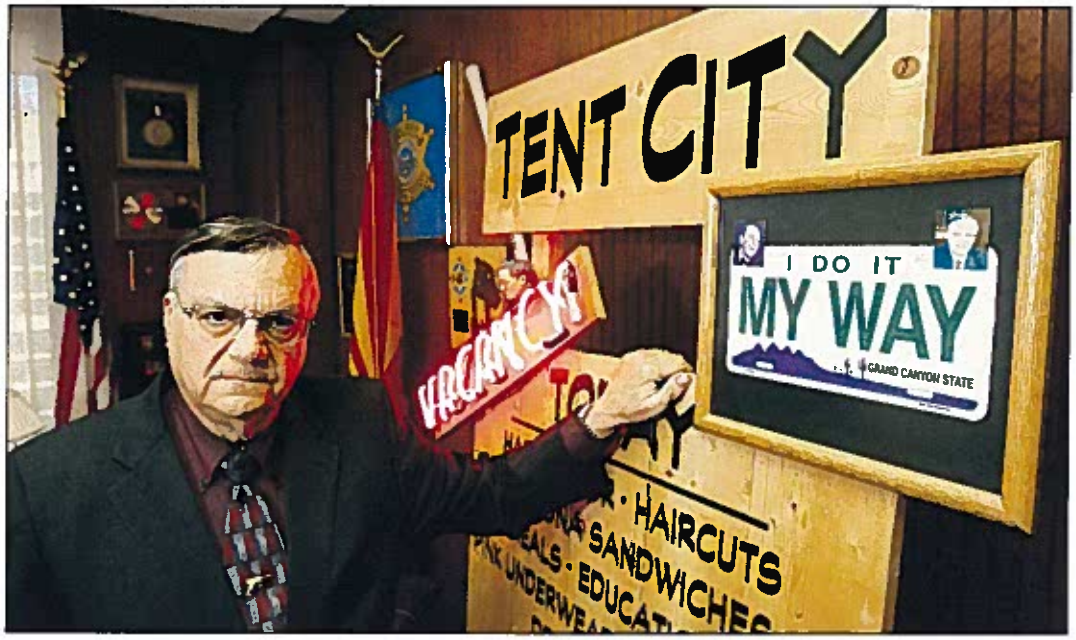
Locally, you can report it to the: **Human Trafficking Rescue Project at 816-325-7867**



Victims...or co-conspirators?

Sheriff's actions against illegal immigrants win wide support. Others fault that approach.

By MIKE MCGRAW
The Kansas City Star



ROSS D. FRANKLIN | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Famous for his hard stance against illegal immigration, Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, Ariz., says arresting those who are smuggled in "only makes sense."

If there is a fault line between America's war on human trafficking and the battle over illegal immigration, it runs through Maricopa County, Ariz.

That's where world-famous Sheriff Joe Arpaio is using a 2005 state law aimed at smugglers of illegal immigrants to also go after the "smugglees" who paid to get here.

Arpaio arrests them as co-conspirators in their own smuggling.

"It only makes sense," Arpaio said in a recent interview. "They are part of the criminal act, but we are still the only county in the state enforcing it."

While the sheriff is cheered on by illegal immigration hardliners, however, others suggest that some of those "co-conspirators" could also be human trafficking victims.

In fact, immigration experts argue that tighter border restrictions and resulting higher smuggling costs have put illegal migrants at an ever-greater risk of being abused and, ultimately enslaved by their smuggler.

But Arpaio doesn't buy it.

"That's just another thing for the open border people and the politicians to always come up with a rationale," Arpaio said. "It's just another way to let them (illegal immigrants) stay."

Maricopa County Attorney Andrew Thomas, who has successfully prosecuted numerous co-conspirators, agrees. "While everyone can sympathize with people in poor countries who yearn for a better life, the law is the law and people are not allowed to conspire to smuggle themselves illegally into Arizona."

Even if the person being smuggled is abused, Thomas said, "we still don't issue a pardon" to the illegal immigrant.

Arpaio has continued his sweeps for illegal immigrants, even after the government rescinded his federal authority to pursue immigrants and opened an investigation of alleged Latino profiling by his department.

"This is absurd; I live in an unreal county," said Arizona state Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, a Phoenix Democrat who helped push the 2005 state law. "Thomas is a maniac. He is prosecuting the victims of these crimes as co-conspirators in their own victimhood."

So could some of those "co-conspirators" be human trafficking victims under federal law? And if so, are Maricopa County officials violating the federal anti-trafficking act?

"In theory, absolutely they could qualify as human trafficking victims," said Kara Hartzler, legal director for the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project.

"But most of them don't want to sit in jail long enough to make that claim."

Referrals cease to Hope House local shelter

By MIKE MCGRAW AND LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

The U.S. attorney's office has stopped referring human trafficking victims to the Hope House domestic violence shelter, a primary grantee in the federal task force here.

The action came after the shelter failed to fulfill some of its obligations under the grant, human trafficking sources told The Star.

Hope House — which has provided shelter to more than 10,000 domestic abuse victims in the Kansas City area — received a $450,000 Justice Department grant in 2006 to expand its services to human trafficking victims.

Hope House CEO Mary Anne Metheny acknowledged recently that its human trafficking coordinator had left and wasn't replaced. But she said she wasn't aware of any problems related to the federal grant.

"We've met all the requirements ... and have been in compliance," Metheny said.

She also said that Hope House had accurately reported to the Justice Department that it aided 60 human trafficking victims under the three-year grant.

But Don Ledford, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney, said Hope House's number does not accurately reflect the number of victims referred to Hope House by all task force agencies. Metheny maintains 60 victims is an accurate number because it reflects referrals from a variety of sources.

Ledford confirmed that Hope House is not currently serving any trafficking victims referred by any task force members. But he wouldn't say where future trafficking victims might be sent.

The local human trafficking task force has claimed numerous successes in the last three years. But federal grant reports show that it has been dogged by some of the same problems as many of the 41 other federally funded task forces across the country.

One federal audit noted last year that anti-trafficking organizations had inflated their numbers.

Lack of participation by some law enforcement agencies is another problem. Hope House's federal grant reports noted that it was "very difficult to get all law enforcement agencies to attend task force meetings."

That leads to "poor coordination," Hope House officials said. The Independence Police Department, which got a separate $450,000 federal grant to train police officers to recognize trafficking victims, cited similar frustrations.

According to its 2008 reports, "Cooperation between the different organizations is becoming poor. Since the last report, there have been no FBI or ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) personnel attending any working group meetings. Additionally few agencies have participated in any reporting."

FBI and ICE spokesmen acknowledged their agencies had missed several meetings. Participation improved after the U.S. attorney began hosting meetings downtown.

U.S. Attorney Matt Whitworth, however, downplayed the issues raised in the reports.

"This is a cooperative venture ... that continues to evolve and strengthen as we work together to combat human trafficking," Whitworth said.

The Star's Mark Morris contributed to this report.

Cumbersome rules plague visas

Program to help victims is open to 5,000 a year — but far fewer visas are issued by U.S. officials.

By MIKE MCGRAW and LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

As an apology to trafficking victims for what happened to them on U.S. soil, Congress created a special visa status allowing those who came here illegally to remain.

It's called "T-visa status" and allows up to 5,000 victims a year to stay in America for up to four years. After three years, they can apply to stay permanently.

But the visa's requirements are especially onerous for victims of sex trafficking and have revictimized thousands of trafficking survivors, The Kansas City Star found.

After Congress authorized the visas in 2000, it took the federal bureaucracy two years to implement the program. The resulting delays meant that "thousands of victims have failed to obtain the benefits afforded to them," according to a recent ombudsman's report for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which issues the visas.

In fact, as of June, only 1,541 T-visas have been issued in the past seven years.

Once the process begins, there are many hoops to jump through in the complex process that can take nearly a year.

For one thing, the visa is only available to victims of what the government calls a "severe form of trafficking." Proof of "force, fraud or coercion" must accompany a daunting nine-page application.

It requires victims — even sex trafficking victims — to describe in detail what happened to them. For some that is too overwhelming, and they don't apply for the visa.

If the victims came to the United States illegally or committed a crime — even if they were forced to do so by their trafficker — they are required to seek forgiveness through a separate process that the government calls a "waiver of inadmissibility." Denials of the waiver can't be appealed.

Applicants must also prove they would suffer "extreme hardship involving unusual and severe harm" if they were deported.

Historically, the most controversial requirement has been that victims comply with a "reasonable request" by law enforcement to help prosecute their traffickers. That's a potential Catch-22 that doesn't account for the fact that many traffickers threaten to kill their victims or their families back home if they come forward.

New provisions this year allow for exceptions if federal officials agree a victim is "unlikely or unable to cooperate ... because of physical or psychological trauma." But while T-visas may no longer require cooperation with prosecutors in every case, a failure to do so could still affect the outcome.

In some jurisdictions, prosecutors require cooperation from a victim before law enforcement will provide affidavits vouching for T-visa applicants. Though victims can receive the visas without such an endorsement, it can be more difficult.

Still, anti-trafficking advocates contend that the T-visa process remains too much of a prosecutor's tool and not enough of a method for rescuing victims.

"If victims choose not to cooperate, the threat of deportation places them in fear of retaliation from traffickers and at risk of being re-trafficked," said Alese Wooditch, a human trafficking expert at George Mason University.

Nationwide, about one of every four applicants is denied, according to numbers released in June. But a state-by-state analysis shows large geographic disparities.

In states such as California, Texas and New York, where attorneys and law enforcement are highly trained in human trafficking, the denial rate is lower. But in large parts of the interior United States, where there is less awareness, more people are denied.

In Washington state, only 40 percent of the applicants for trafficking visa status are denied, while in Louisiana and Oklahoma it's as high as 80 percent.

As of June, Kansas remained one of only nine states and U.S. territories with no T-visa applications. Yet in neighboring Missouri, only 20 percent of the 24 T-visa applications filed were denied.

Despite such disparities, federal officials said their goal is to protect victims.

"Our adjudication officers look at this in a very humanitarian way, this is a hope and status we can give to people who deserve it," said Chris Rhatigan, Citizenship and Immigration Services spokeswoman. "We approve the cases that meet the standards of the T-visa status."

Yet some critics don't see it that way.

"This whole system is so subjective. There's no consistency," said Kent Felty, an immigration attorney from Colorado. He said federal bureaucrats "got it locked in their heads that unless you're in chains and there are bars on the windows you are not a victim of a severe enough form of human trafficking."

In Louisiana, Felty sought help for 215 welders from India who incurred large debts to come here on work visas and wound up confined to an out-of-the-way motel and told not to leave without permission.

None of the men could pay the usurious interest on their debts back in India. But Felty said they were told they couldn't complain because the company "owned them" and would deport them if they did not do as they were told.

All 215 of their T-visa applications were denied because, under the law, it wasn't considered a severe form of human trafficking.

TRAFFICKING VISAS AWARDED

Congress has approved a visa for human trafficking victims and given authorities permission to issue 5,000 a year. The government estimates that up to 140,000 victims have been trafficked into the U.S. since 2002. But bureaucrats have issued only a fraction of the visas available. Here is where the visas have been awarded as of June 2009.

Alaska	6	Mont.	0
Ala.	4	N.C.	20
Ark.	0	N.D.	0
Ariz.	7	Neb.	0
Calif.	294	N.H.	2
Colo.	26	N.J.	27
Conn.	20	N.M.	0
D.C.	87	Nev.	15
Del.	0	N.Y.	197
Fla.	65	Ohio	3
Ga.	46	Okla.	54
Hawaii	43	Ore.	12
Iowa	0	Penn.	52
Idaho	3	PR**	0
Ill.	31	R.I.	0
Ind.	14	S.C.	1
Kan.	0	S.D.	5
Ky.	1	Tenn.	5
La.	1	Texas	237
Mass.	17	Utah	67
Md.	20	Va.	53
Maine	0	VI***	0
Mich.	9	Vt.	0
Minn.	7	Wash.	39
Mo.	19	W. Va.	0
MP*	28	Wisc.	0
Miss.	3	Wyo.	1

TOTAL: 1,541

* Marianas Islands ** Puerto Rico
*** Virgin Islands

Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Vermont Service Center

THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Determined prosecutor combats trafficking with novel tactics

Operating out of KC, she has prosecuted more such cases than any other assistant U.S. attorney.

By MARK MORRIS
The Kansas City Star

Kansas City's move to become a national leader in human trafficking prosecutions began in the spring of 2006, when a newly appointed U.S. attorney held his first staff meeting.

Bradley Schlozman announced that he intended to make trafficking one of his top priorities and asked for volunteers.

Cynthia Cordes, a young career prosecutor who had joined the office barely two years earlier, stepped forward, and over the next three years prosecuted 36 alleged traffickers — more than any other assistant U.S. attorney in the country. Most of those have been domestic sex trafficking cases.

Cordes, who divides her time between human trafficking, computer crimes and child exploitation cases, has earned a reputation as a tough, tenacious and creative prosecutor.


Cordes

U.S. Attorney Matt Whitworth said Cordes, who heads the local Human Trafficking Rescue Project, has been a key player in attacking such issues.

"Her diligence in aggressively prosecuting these cases has helped to give the Western District of Missouri one of the most successful task forces in the nation," Whitworth said. "She works tirelessly to combat modern-day slavery and raise public awareness. Her innovative approach in several significant cases has become a model for federal prosecutors throughout the Department of Justice."

Last August, Linda Smith, president of Shared Hope International, praised Cordes as a "pioneer" for using a federal human-trafficking law to prosecute customers who allegedly tried to pay for sex with children.

Since then, at least five other U.S. attorney's offices, from Virginia to Alabama, have prosecuted other defendants using Cordes' aggressive approach, Smith noted.

"I hope if anything can be learned from our task force's success, it is that human trafficking can be anywhere in the United States," Cordes said. "Human traffickers are the most successful when they target the most meek and weak in our community."

Some criminal defense lawyers, however, are less enthusiastic. They grumble privately that she is unyielding and slow to turn over case records.

But no defense lawyer has been harsher in his criticism than Eric Chase, a Californian who came to Kansas City to defend St. Joseph pharmacist Walter Sewell on child pornography charges.

In the case against Sewell, Cordes sought to use a novel interpretation of child pornography law to increase his mandatory minimum sentence from five to 15 years. Cordes contended that Sewell's use of file-sharing computer software made him a mass distributor of child porn who constantly revictimized the children whose images he distributed.

Chase described Cordes' pursuit of his client as "malodorous," "vicious," and "mean-spirited" and confidently predicted that she would be reversed on appeal.

But that process only earned Cordes a bigger fan base.

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case, leaving in place a 15-year sentence based on Cordes' interpretation of the statute.

Kingpins live the high life on workers' efforts

Yet laborers sometimes go without heating or air conditioning in their spartan accommodations.

In all labor trafficking investigations, prosecutors follow the money.

Records obtained by The Kansas City Star show that between 2005 and 2008, the alleged Giant Labor Solutions conspiracy deposited $1.23 million in checks from area hotels as payment for housekeeping services.

That included almost $700,000 from the Westin Crown Center and almost $200,000 from two Hilton properties, the Doubletree and the Embassy Suites on the Plaza.

Spokesmen for the hotels declined to comment on the case, citing the pending investigation.

But in an interview with The Star, GLS defendant Ilkham Fazilov said that at least one of his co-defendants sent money home by purchasing automobiles and having them shipped back to Uzbekistan.

Fazilov, however, contends he never made more than $2,000 a month while working as a hotel housekeeper for Giant Labor. Fazilov denied any knowledge of human trafficking, but investigators have claimed that he kept more than $85,000 from the scheme.

Though many of the defendants charged in the local conspiracy lived modestly in apartments scattered throughout the metro area, defendants in other labor trafficking conspiracies that fed off H-2B visas have lived much higher.

Though only a middle manager in a Virginia-based visa-fraud scheme, Gabor Teglasi had plenty of cash to indulge his love for toys. When he pleaded guilty last spring, Teglasi agreed to give up a 2008 Nissan Titan pickup, a 2004 BMW X3 automobile, a 2008 Can Am motorcycle, two boats and a pair of personal watercraft.

But Jekaterina Cerednicenko, a bookkeeper and girlfriend of Virginia conspiracy kingpin Viktar Krus, may have set the standard for excess.

According to investigators, Cerednicenko transferred more than $1 million to her European accounts while living in a $700,000 home in the United States. Even her doghouse had an independent air-conditioning and heating system.

"Workers often did not have heating and/or air conditioning in the housing provided by (Cerednicenko) and Viktar Krus," prosecutors observed.

Krus, Cerednicenko and Teglasi each were convicted earlier this year of conspiracy to transport and harbor illegal aliens and are now serving prison terms of 87, 78 and 50 months, respectively.

And last week, authorities in Brazil announced they had arrested 11 people there for operating a $52 million H-2B visa fraud scheme since 2002.

According to the U.S. consulate in Sao Paulo, the scheme promised U.S. jobs to at least 4,500 Brazilians, demanding payments of up to $15,000 for each visa.

The investigation opened in 2004 when U.S. fraud prevention experts in Sao Paulo detected irregularities with visa applications. Brazilian authorities joined the investigation four years later.

| Mark Morris,
mmorris@kcstar.com

Air fleets fraught with woes

Immigration agency and marshals service each have their own planes for moving prisoners and deportees.

By MIKE MCGRAW
The Kansas City Star

Attorney General Janet Reno presided over a shotgun marriage between two federal air fleets in 1995. The union was supposed to increase efficiency and save money.

Like many forced marriages, however, it's been anything but blissful — for human trafficking victims, deportees and U.S. taxpayers alike.

The merger combined the air operations of the U.S. Marshals Service, which transported federal prisoners, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which deported illegal immigrants. At the time, both were part of the Justice Department.

It became known as the Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System, which inspired the 1997 movie "Con-Air." The merged operation is headquartered in Kansas City, North.

But the relationship began to fall apart in 2003, when Congress moved the immigration service to the new Department of Homeland Security. Then one of the partners took on a new name that would chill any marriage: ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

Spats continued and federal auditors in 2006 blamed both parties for irreconcilable differences.

Not only were there safety and security concerns, but the operation also was woefully inefficient. Some of the fleet's 100-seat passenger jetliners were taking off more than half empty.

Auditors also found that ICE cost the combined operation even more money by failing to help the Marshals Service plan for anticipated passenger loads.

Taxpayers wrote an $87 million check to keep the merged fleet afloat in 2005. ICE spent another $63 million chartering separate flights to keep up with ever-increasing deportations, heightening the tensions.

Indeed, ICE paid as much as $16,000 per seat to deport illegal immigrants on one-way charter flights to Africa and the Middle East, records show.

ICE maintains such expenditures are sometimes required for "high-profile cases" in which deportees refused to board commercial flights. But that's still five times the cost of a round-trip ticket to London on Virgin Atlantic Airlines.

ICE continues to depend on the Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System for many deportation and transfer flights for illegal immigrants. But lengthy delays have caused considerable friction at further costs to taxpayers.

Records show that numerous flights — which run at least $3,500 an hour to operate — have sat idling on the tarmac for hours awaiting ICE deportees. In one incident in 2007, an airliner flew to Georgia to pick up 127 deportees who never arrived.

The whole flight was wasted, one guard noted, because of a "communication problem."

ICE officials don't dispute being tardy and acknowledged there were some "avoidable" incidents. It attributed other delays to mechanical and air traffic problems or bad weather.

But ICE said it will continue to use the planes at least through September, at which time it will decide whether to walk away for good after nearly 15 years together.


THE KANSAS CITY STAR

NEW FUNDS PROMPT NEW HOPE

Careers gain altitude

Sunday's Chiefs game won't be on local TV

ANGELS LEND A HAND

KCP&L requests another rate hike

HUMAN TRAFFICKING | Congress ramps up efforts to fight problem

NEW FUNDS PROMPT NEW HOPE

From prevention to prosecution, push aims to help victims and halt traffickers.

@ Go to **KansasCity.com** for the five-part Human Trafficking in America series, plus videos and photos.

By MIKE McGRAW and LAURA BAUER
The Kansas City Star

America's war on human trafficking got its biggest-ever one-year boost in federal funding following President Barack Obama's signing of an appropriations bill, one of several significant anti-trafficking developments this week.

The legislation contains a $12.5 million increase in funds to fight human trafficking in the United States. That money and other provisions of the law address problems identified in a five-part series this week in The Kansas City Star.

Included in the omnibus appropriation bill signed into law Wednesday is money to provide services to U.S.-born human trafficking victims — mainly underage girls forced into the sex trade. Previously, only foreign-born victims got federal anti-trafficking aid.

Jolene Smith, CEO and co-founder of Free the Slaves, called the additional funding a "watershed moment."

"The fact that we were able to get this increase in such a tough economic climate shows that the U.S. is moving in the right direction," Smith said.

She noted that The Star's series helped focus needed attention on human trafficking, but she added that more money alone won't solve the problem.

"This is an incremental increase," she said. "It is not transformational."

Meanwhile, a California congresswoman said Thursday that she would use The Star's investigation of human trafficking at upcoming oversight hearings to help reform U.S. detention and deportation policies.

"We are concerned about deportation practices, so we may do some combination oversight hearings," said U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a Democrat whose House subcommittee oversees detention and de-

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TRAFFICKING: Enforcement is bolstered

FROM A1

portation rules. "Your findings should get wider circulation."

The Star's series examined America's failures to find and rescue tens of thousands of human trafficking victims estimated to be in the United States. The newspaper also found that U.S. officials too often deported and abused those victims, some on Kansas City-based government airlines.

Lofgren said that she and a colleague, in consultation with Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, also introduced a bill Wednesday to reform the H-2B work visa program, which The Star found is often used fraudulently by traffickers.

And Cabinet officials within the Obama administration have said that in January they will announce a major set of initiatives in the anti-trafficking battle.

But it was the additional funding that anti-trafficking groups were applauding the loudest Thursday.

"We are delighted about a 25 percent increase in appropriations overall, and we are delighted it covers both foreign nationals and domestic victims," said Mark Lagon, former State Department anti-trafficking czar and now CEO of the Polaris Project, a nonprofit group that combats human trafficking.

The measure also addresses problems with uneven enforcement of the federal anti-trafficking law and for the first time requires every U.S. attorney's office in the nation to designate a human trafficking point person.

In western Missouri, Assistant U.S. Attorney Cynthia Cordes already has assumed that role and used it to help her office prosecute more alleged traffickers than any other U.S. attorney in the country.

The addition of such an anti-trafficking contact in U.S. attorneys' offices should "improve communication and coordination within each jurisdiction, including with victim services organizations, in order to better serve the victims of human trafficking and slavery," according to the new legislation.

The funding measure was pushed by members of the congressional human trafficking caucus, including Rep. Chris Smith, a New Jersey Republican, and Rep. Carolyn Maloney, a New York Democrat.

Overall, the $12.5 million in increased appropriations will provide a 25 percent increase in funding for counseling, housing and legal assistance for trafficking survivors. That includes more money for human trafficking task forces around the country, including one in Kansas City.

Of the total, $5.3 million will go to the Department of Justice's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, a 50 percent increase from last year.

The unit has posted a 600 percent increase in its caseload over the past four years. Many trafficking experts had told The Star that — despite increased prosecutions — the federal government is not convicting as many traffickers as other countries with good anti-trafficking records.

An additional $6 million will go to the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, a 34 percent increase from last year.

The U.S. Department of Labor's International Labor Affairs Bureau will receive a 7 percent increase, for a total of $93 million. Some of those dollars will be used for anti-trafficking efforts.

But Jolene Smith pointed out that all U.S. citizens could help fight human trafficking around the world by simply changing their buying habits.

"We need to make it clear to businesses that slavery is too high a price to pay for cheap goods," she said. "Businesses need to ... uncover whether there is slavery in their supply chain and, if so, work together with communities and governments to root it out."

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THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2009

THE STAR'S EDITORIAL

To stamp out human trafficking, authorities need more effective training

Set free the victims of modern slavery

Slavery still haunts this country, including instances here in Kansas City.

That was clear in The Kansas City Star's five-day series, "Human Trafficking in America."

The series, which ended Thursday, exposed the horrors of contemporary indentured servitude. It must be a call to action, for Congress, the president, state and local governments, police forces and every individual who opposes human rights abuses.

While the United States points fingers globally at nations for failing to do enough to end human trafficking, our own poorly enforced laws and cumbersome bureaucracy often mean America does worse in preventing and dealing with the practices than many of the nations it criticizes.

The series showed that while this issue is clearly international in scope, it's also very local. The largest suspected human trafficking ring ever uncovered by U.S. law enforcement was based in Kansas City.

For almost a decade, three companies and 12 accused human traffickers allegedly took advantage of a guest worker visa program that is easy to defraud.

It's hard to grasp that in 2009 actual slaves were cleaning Kansas City hotel rooms, working in area restaurants, serving as housecleaners and being forced into prostitution.

Some attempt to "blame the victim," arguing that these slaves were trapped while trying to illegally enter this country. The tragedy of human bondage in modern America though cannot be accepted for any individual, regardless of status. Fighting illegal immigration is a problem. Eliminating slavery is a moral imperative.

And while it's vile in any nation, it is more reprehensible here. This nation, unlike any other in the history of the world, was formed to honor the self-evident truth that "All men are created equal."

This nation outlawed slavery after the Civil War.

Today's modern version, of course, differs from that of the past. Instead of slave ships there are commercial flights or trips across the porous U.S.-Mexican border.

There are no public auctions of human beings. Instead, those auctions are held in private. It is hard to know which is more appalling, that one set of humans sells off another, or that another set of humans is willing to buy.

As the series by three reporters revealed, poor, desperate individuals are trapped into bondage. In many cases, they approach someone to help them find a better life in the United States, believing they will arrive, legally, to clean homes or work in a particular business. Instead, they arrive to be told that they have incurred a large amount of debt, and that they will have to do the bidding of those who brought them for years to repay it. They are bought and sold. Their forced labor, even prostitution, only deepens the debt to their "sponsor (owner)."

And for a final indignity, when (or if) their captors are finally caught and arrested, these victims are arrested along with them.

Post-arrest they are frequently stuffed onto deportation flights back to their home countries, and even drugged so they'll be quiet on the flights, where they may again face the gangs that first ensnared them.

Four critical suggestions from the series must be followed.

- The United States must find ways to locate and free more victims. This requires better training for police, and a public better educated to recognize the problem.
- Work visa program rules must be strengthened to crack down on fraud.
- A better-coordinated search must begin for victims. Agencies must work together to avoid re-victimizing those already suffering.
- Law enforcement officers must be relieved of conflicts that expect them to both arrest illegal immigrants and identify victims, two jobs that don't go together well. And police must be trained to elicit information from frightened, reluctant victims.

Flor, a Mexican immigrant trapped into indentured servitude said: "I thought slaves were only in the past, just in history. It happens every day."

It shouldn't:

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude ... shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." — 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified Dec. 6, 1865.


Opinion

Set free the victims of modern slavery

THE STAR'S HUMAN TRAFFICKING PROJECT TEAM

Earlier this year, when a massive federal indictment revealed that Kansas City had become a hub for trafficking, three reporters began investigating America's track record on this growing international human rights problem.

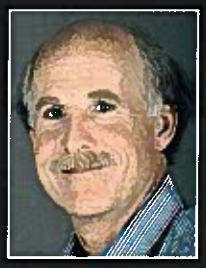
The stories took reporters and a photographer from crowded Guatemalan migrant shelters to the deadly streets of Tijuana, Mexico.

Reporters also spent six months conducting hundreds of interviews and reviewing thousands of pages of court documents, as well as government records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

Bauer

McGraw

Morris



Myers

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Bill Dalton, The Star's political editor, edited the project. Call him at 816-234-4919, or send e-mail to bdalton@kcstar.com.

Don Munday edited the copy. **Greg Branson, Hector Casanova** and **Dave Eames** produced the graphics; **Charles Gooch** designed the pages.

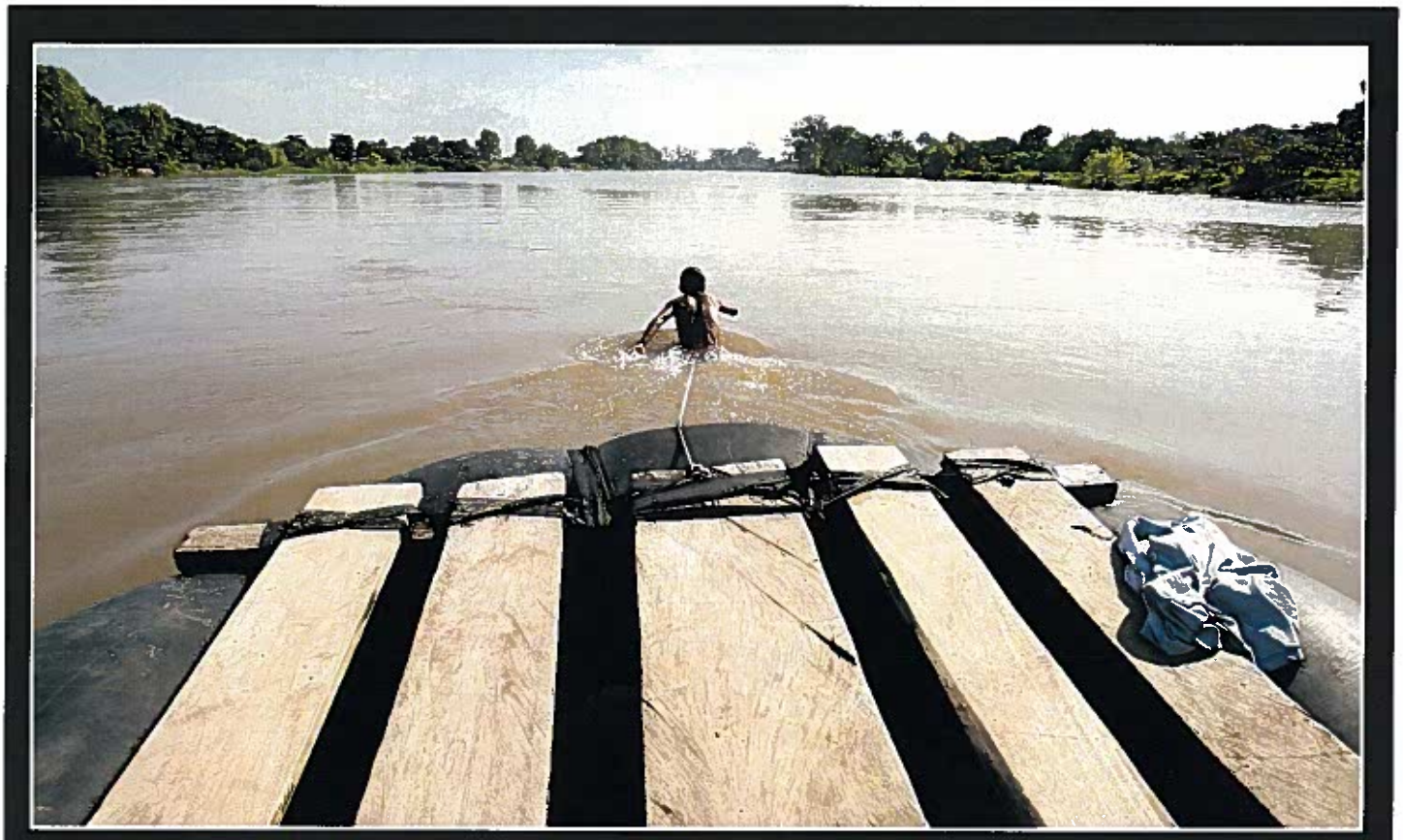
PROTECTING THE VICTIMS

In researching the series, Kansas City Star reporters conducted hundreds of interviews with human trafficking experts, government officials, prosecutors and law enforcement officers across the United States.

They sought out survivors of modern-day slavery, many of whom were reluctant to discuss their experiences. In every case, the newspaper followed ground rules suggested by anti-trafficking advocates in an effort to avoid re-traumatizing them.

In some cases, the newspaper withheld the names of survivors, or showed only a portion of their faces in photographs, in order to protect them from violent traffickers, some of whom remain at large. Some survivors, however, didn't object to having their photos published as long as their full names weren't disclosed.

Scenes in the Hostage House stories were based on extensive interviews with those involved in the trafficking case.



KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

A CLOSER LOOK | **GUATEMALAN-MEXICAN BORDER**

The point where a perilous journey begins

TECUN UMAN, Guatemala | This is the first frontier for many migrants — some of them future human trafficking victims — in joining an estimated 12 million other illegal workers already living in the United States.

After they are warned of the dangers that lie ahead in their journey to America, most of the migrants at a shelter in Tecun Uman, Guatemala, head out the door and walk a block to the well-trodden banks of the Suchiate River.

The crossing into Mexico on a makeshift raft costs ten Guatemalan quetzals (about $1.20). There's no extra charge for the raft boy's exquisite timing in avoiding Mexican police who sometimes stand on the opposite bank to exact a bribe.

"We try to tell the migrants that sometimes it is better to eat a tortilla with your family than to die on the way up," says the Rev. Ademar Barilli, the straight-talking, gun-toting Brazilian priest who runs the shelter, Casa del Migrante.

"But most of them stay here just one night and keep going because if they go back and don't pay back their loans, the coyotes will kill them."

The shelter offers a free night's sleep to about 180 migrants a week. It also offers sanctuary from the kidnappers, thieves and narco traffickers who roam with impunity through this squalid, violent border town.

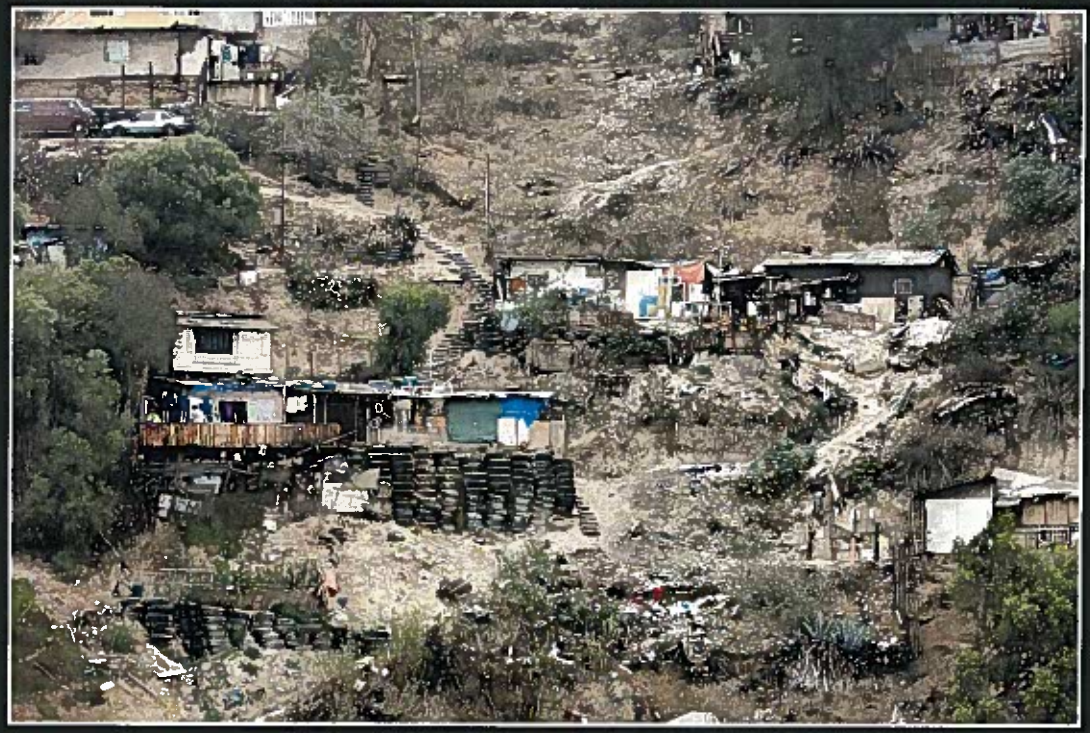
After breakfast, the migrants clean up the courtyard, listen to the warnings about the increasing number of kidnappings and rapes in Mexico, and are given information on routes, clothing, medicine, food and their rights if arrested.

A bricklayer and concrete mason, Jose Gomez hops on the raft on the next leg of his journey to Los Angeles. "If I am willing to work for less than a U.S. worker, then I will get a job," says Gomez, who is fleeing the coup in Honduras.

Some migrants acknowledge that even in a recession, the life of a human trafficking victim in America is better than life back home.

"For the poor there is no economic crisis," Barilli says. "Whatever you make is a gain."

| Mike McGraw, mcgraw@kcstar.com



PHOTOS BY KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

A CLOSER LOOK | **THE U.S.-MEXICAN BORDER**

Time after time, they run from squalor

TIJUANA, Mexico | Agents who patrol the border between the United States and Mexico near Tijuana know some people will try just about anything to come to America.

The squalid conditions in Tijuana (above) are why they are so desperate for a better life.

Agents see people smuggled inside homemade coffins secured underneath a vehicle. Bottoms of boats lined with men, women and children.

Or they see immigrants like this man, who exploits any opening in the fence and makes a run for it. Though a Border Patrol agent wasn't far away, he took his chance in broad daylight.

And he wasn't the only immigrant who squeezed through this section of fence that day.

Nearly every day, maintenance crews near the San Ysidro point of entry at Tijuana travel along the steel fence between the two countries just patching holes. Immigrants often use battery-powered saws to cut an opening.

"It's job security," joked Edward Legaspi, a member of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection fence crew, as he patched a hole one morning.

Mondays are the busiest, he said, with up to a half-dozen gaping holes left from the weekend.

| Laura Bauer, lbauer@kcstar.com

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

A CLOSER LOOK | **INCOME FOR GUATEMALANS**

Money flows home to poor countries

SAN MIGUEL DUENAS, Guatemala | Maria Asuncion Otzin, called "Mama Chon," nurtures her sick birds. She believes her neighbors poisoned them because they wanted some of the money her daughter sent home from her job in America.

Otzin's daughter, who entered the United States illegally, sends money to supplement her parents' income from selling firewood and chocolate-covered fruits. But because Otzin wouldn't share it with neighbors, she says, they killed her pig and some of her chickens and poisoned her pet birds.

In poor countries such as Guatemala, such "remittances" from expatriates — often working illegally or as human trafficking victims — make up a huge part of the national income.

Even in the depths of the global recession, remittances to families in Guatemala, most from the United States, exceeded $4.5 billion last year, according to the World Bank.

They typically come in small payments of $100, $200 or $300 at a time.

| Mike McGraw, mcgraw@kcstar.com

KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

A CLOSER LOOK | **ONE DEPORTEE'S STORY**

Flight south ends trek north

ABOARD A DEPORTATION FLIGHT TO GUATEMALA CITY | When the father of her two children abandoned her in Guatemala, 30-year-old Dominga Angelica Majia set out for America.

Majia left her children with her mother and worked her way across Mexico, cleaning houses and doing other people's laundry in return for food and a ride to the next house north.

It took her a month to reach the U.S. border, where she crossed into Texas on her own.

She was here only two weeks when an immigration agent caught her on June 30.

"If I had paid a coyote, I probably wouldn't have been caught," Majia said.

But she also knows that hiring a "coyote" — someone who specializes in sneaking immigrants across the border — may have subjected her to the kind of abuse and debts that entrap many human trafficking victims.

As a U.S.-chartered deportation flight descended into Guatemala City this summer, Majia appeared apprehensive but said she was happy to be returning home.

| Mike McGraw, mcgraw@kcstar.com

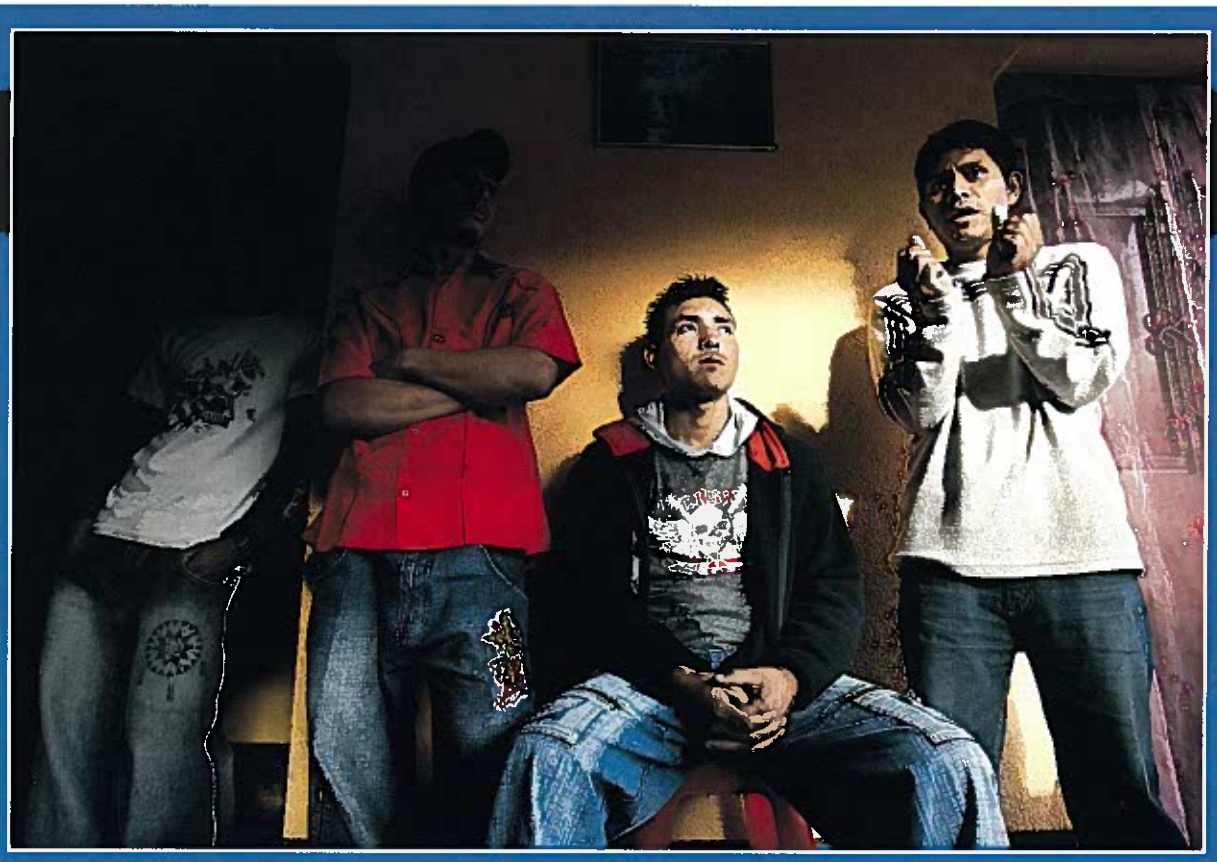
The endless cycle of despair

At home, they live in desperation ... poor, hungry, jobless. They see America as their chance, their hope for a better future. And so they leave all they've ever known behind and trek thousands of miles in search of better lives. But what they find, too often, is more agony.

Surrounded by smoke, a man picks his way through a burning garbage dump outside San Jose Calderas, Guatemala.

PHOTOS BY KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

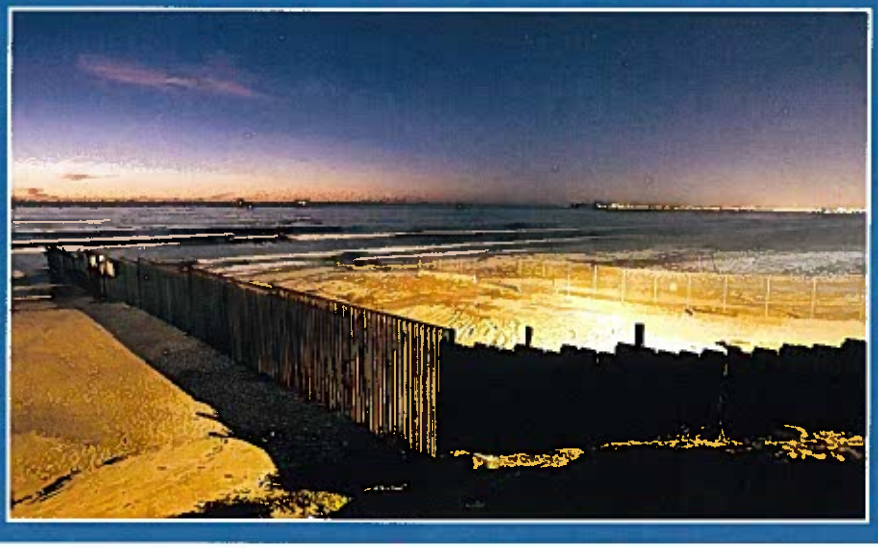
Headed into Mexico on their way toward the U.S., migrants ride a makeshift raft across the Suchiate River on Guatemala's northern border.



In Guatemala, former Postville, Iowa, worker Luis Alberto Diaz Cujcuj (right) demonstrates how he was chained on a deportation flight from the U.S. Talking with him are former Postville underage workers Marcos Alexander Guerra Garcia (from left), Osbeli Junesh Hernandez and Alfredo Marroquin Argueta.

PHOTOS BY KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Having been deported by the U.S. and returned to Guatemala, immigrants are processed upon arrival in Guatemala City — as security crews watch.



The border fence at Tijuana, Mexico, stretches into the Pacific Ocean in this scene at dusk. In the distance shine the lights of the United States.


THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

BIG 12 LIVES...WITH 10

Progress cited, but more work ahead to end trafficking

Wet week makes muck, mire

Music uncovers past buried by dementia

Progress cited, but more work ahead to end trafficking

Annual report, released Monday, for the first time ranks the U.S. along with other countries.

By MARK MORRIS and MIKE McGRAW
The Kansas City Star

The United States stands with the world's top nations in its efforts to stop human trafficking but still could do a better job, according to a new report.

The finding came after a yearlong examination by the State Department and was the first time U.S. officials had ranked their efforts to fight human trafficking on the same scale they use to judge other countries.

But the report released Monday also noted that the U.S. finds only a tiny fraction of the nation's human-trafficking victims, and poorly trained law enforcement authorities are sometimes unwilling to help the victims they do find.

The critique was the most closely watched portion of the 10th annual global Trafficking in Persons Report released in Washington and mirrored most of the findings of a five-day series published last year by The Kansas City Star.

"The United States takes its first-ever ranking not as a reprieve but as a responsibility to strengthen global efforts against modern slavery, including those within America," said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

About 175 countries are ranked in this year's government report. The United States ranked in the top, or "Tier 1," category with 30 other countries, most of them

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TRAFFICKING: Report notably candid

FROM A1

in Western Europe.

Experts on human trafficking, however, said the State Department report was candid in pointing out weaknesses in America's complex anti-trafficking bureaucracy.

Kevin Bales, an internationally-recognized expert on human trafficking and the president of the anti-trafficking group Free the Slaves, called the report the best yet in the State Department's 10-year series of reports, which are mandated by Congress.

"It doesn't pull any punches," Bales said of the new report.

Clinton and the 373-page report she unveiled acknowledged that the U.S. was "a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labor, debt bondage, and forced prostitution."

The report noted that the U.S. can do much better at fighting such abuses in a number of areas. Despite significant expenditures of tax money, authorities find only a few of the human-trafficking victims thought to be in the country.

The report also said efforts to identify children who are involved in the sex trade are "not well coordinated."

The report also identified U.S. guest-worker programs as an avenue for labor traffickers and called on authorities to work harder at prosecuting such cases.

Mary Bauer, the legal director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, said the government has taken a step forward by admitting its problems.

"I appreciate that I'm not hearing from the government that everything is fine, but it doesn't do anything for exploited workers," Bauer said.

Kansas City was mentioned in the report in a short section on labor trafficking involving Jamaica. It contained the story of "Sheldon," who entered the country illegally on a guest-worker visa. Alleged traffickers then loaded Sheldon down with debt, forced him to live in crowded apartments and made him clean rooms in some of the city's best-known hotels for little or no money.

In May 2009, local prosecutors charged the people who brought Sheldon to Kansas City as part of what the prosecutors called the largest labor-trafficking ring uncovered in U.S. history.

Overall, 22 countries were upgraded from last year's rankings. Nineteen were downgraded, including Switzerland, which U.S. officials ranked in Tier Two with such countries as Angola, Liberia and Mexico.

Thirty-one countries were rated as Tier One this year along with the United States, indicating that U.S. officials thought those countries made significant efforts to stop human trafficking. There were 28 Tier One countries in 2009.

The report listed 12 countries in Tier Three — the worst category — down from 17 in 2009. Moving out of Tier Three to a higher category were Chad, Fiji, Niger, Swaziland and Syria.

In further recognizing that the United States needs to improve its efforts, the State Department also named Laura Germino as one of its human-trafficking "heroes."

Germino coordinates the anti-slavery campaign for the Florida-based Coalition of Immokalee Workers, one of the most active anti-slavery movements in the U.S. agriculture industry.

"Human trafficking is not someone else's problem," Clinton said. "Involuntary servitude is not something we think or hope doesn't exist in our own communities."

@ To read The Star's series on human trafficking, go to KansasCity.com.

David Goldstein, The Star's Washington correspondent, contributed to this report.
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To reach Mike McGraw, call 816-234-4423 or send e-mail to mcgraw@kcstar.com.

Media chided on sex trafficking

Don't dwell on prurient aspects in coverage, say participants at a U.N. panel discussion.

By MARK MORRIS
The Kansas City Star

UNITED NATIONS | Diplomats and researchers Wednesday urged journalists to not dwell on the salacious details of sex trafficking when reporting on the fight against modern-day slavery.

The admonition came at a U.N. panel discussion in which reporters, filmmakers, public officials and social-service providers were asked to examine the media's role in exposing human trafficking.

Former ABC News correspondent Lynn Sherr, who moderated the panel, acknowledged: "Members of the news media often don't always get it right," preferring instead to focus on sensational stories of abuse.

But Sherr noted that organizers of the panel invited journalists and researchers whose work represented some of the best reporting on human-trafficking issues.

The panel included Kansas City Star reporter Mike McGraw, who was among a team of journalists that last year published an award-winning, five-part series on human trafficking. The Star found that the U.S. government was failing to find and help thousands of human-trafficking victims.

Noy Thrupkaew, a fellow at the Open Society Institute in New York, encouraged reporters to work harder to paint three-dimensional pictures of those who have endured the abuse of modern slavery.

"It's more than the moment of dramatic epiphany and rescue," Thrupkaew said. "Think about what happens in the life of happily ever after. It's a story not only of deprivation but one of resilience."

An Israeli documentary filmmaker, Guy Jacobson, acknowledged that maintaining objectivity also was a problem, particularly after delving deeply into the subject. His latest film, "Redlight," which premieres soon, contains footage he obtained by using undercover cameras in Asian brothels.

Jacobson asked for a show of hands from the more than 400 people who attended the panel discussion in the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council chamber.

"Who thinks that 5-year-olds should be working in a brothel and raped every day?" he asked. "If you do, me and my baseball bat will have that discussion with you outside."

Panelists agreed that protecting victims of human trafficking should be the prime consideration for journalists.

"When I met my first victim who was still in jeopardy, I realized that the preponderance of my victims were still alive, but could soon be dead if I didn't do my reporting correctly," said E. Benjamin Skinner, a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University.

@ Go to **KansasCity.com** to read The Star's series on human trafficking.

Panelists also decried the lack of consistent statistical information on human trafficking. U.S. human-trafficking czar Luis CdeBaca contended that 50,000 people worldwide last year had been freed from slavery. But U.N. Under-Secretary-General Antonio Maria Costa argued that the number was less than half that figure.

"Data is a huge problem for this issue," McGraw noted. "We live in a country that claims to have more than 14,000 victims coming in every year, but we have a visa system that will only help 5,000 a year, even if we found every one."

Even the definition of human trafficking can sometimes trip up reporters, CdeBaca noted.

"If you look at an article in Arizona they mean alien smuggling," CdeBaca said. "If you look at an article in Kansas City or in Florida, they mean slavery."

Costa said the media's role in raising the public's awareness and understanding of the issue was essential.

"How do you rate the role of media?" Costa asked. "The performance would not be an A or B. Maybe a C, if that. But we need the media as a multiplier."

The panel was sponsored by the Schuster Institute, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, and the U.S. Mission to the U.N.

To reach Mark Morris, call 816-234-4310 or send e-mail to mmorris@kcstar.com.

Mike McGraw

Mike McGraw, 61, is a projects reporter for The Kansas City Star. He has also worked at The Hartford Courant and The Des Moines Register.

He began his reporting career in 1972 after graduating from the University of Missouri School of Journalism with a Master of Arts degree in Journalism. He has covered organized labor, agribusiness, the meatpacking industry, federal bureaucracy, Department of Defense contracting practices, NASA, occupational safety and health issues, building collapses, food safety and housing issues and art world fraud.

He is a former member of the board of Investigative Reporters and Editors, and contributor to IRE's "The Reporter's Handbook." Awards include a Pulitzer Prize for national reporting and two George Polk awards.

Laura Bauer

Laura Bauer, 39, has been a reporter at The Kansas City Star for five years. She covers general assignment with special emphasize in crime-related stories. She also worked at The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Ky., and The Springfield News-Leader in Springfield, Mo.

While at The News-Leader, her stories on the death of a toddler in foster care led to an overhaul of the state's child welfare system.

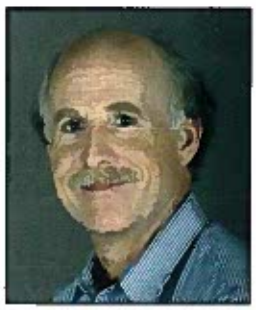
Mark Morris

Mark Morris, 56, covers courts and law enforcement for The Kansas City Star, where he has worked as an editor and reporter for 26 years.

He began his newspaper career in 1977, writing freelance features for The Capital Times in Madison, Wis., and as a stringer for Time Magazine. He then worked as a sportswriter with The Santa Fe Reporter in New Mexico, and edited two Missouri newspapers — The Centralia Fireside Guard and the Kingdom Daily Sun-Gazette — before joining The Star in 1984.

His 2003 true-crime thriller "Fatal Error," co-written with Flint Journal reporter Paul Janczewski, appeared fleetingly on The New York Times extended bestseller list and was the basis of a movie on the Lifetime television network.

Morris is a graduate of William Jewell College, where he majored in music education, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he earned a master's degree in journalism.



Keith Myers

Keith Myers, 56, is a staff photographer for The Kansas City Star, where he has worked as an editor and photographer for 26 years. Myers first worked for the Social Security Administration before beginning his photojournalism career as a stringer for United Press International. At The Star, he began his career as a photographer, moved to night photo editor from 1990 to 1995, and has been shooting since then. He is a graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he earned a BS degree in public administration and a MA degree in journalism.