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Editorial Claims Houston Prosecutors Are Pushing Through Nearly 1,000 Sex Trafficking Indictments Every Day

from the *do-you-even-math* dept

Overhype
by **Tim Cushing**
Mon, Nov 25th 2013
1:56pm

Editorials written in support of legislation are prone to conjuring up hysterical situations/numbers in order to drive the point home. You can't motivate the average reader if there's no hook. But the editorial writer should at least make sure the numbers being used don't immediately prompt incredulous laughter from any reader with a couple of functioning brain cells.

The editorial board for the Dallas Morning News [recently issued a regrettable opinion piece](#) supporting the [Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act](#), which was introduced last week. In the writer's hurry to portray human trafficking as a terrible blight on humanity, credibility went right out the window.

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rp repost

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Two Texas Republicans, Sen. John Cornyn and Rep. Ted Poe of the Houston area, are co-sponsoring a bill that would impose stiff penalties on these adult victimizers of up to life in prison. The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act, which has bipartisan support in both houses, would supplement an existing law that focuses primarily on punishing sex-trafficking organizations abroad.

Poe and Cornyn estimate that one-quarter of U.S. sex-trafficking victims have Texas roots. Poe says our state's proximity to Mexico and high immigrant population give the state a particularly high profile. In Houston alone, about 300,000 sex trafficking cases are prosecuted each year. Tighter border controls and reduced profit margins from the drug trade are pushing organized crime groups to turn increasingly to sex trafficking, law enforcers say.

That ridiculous figure, which posits that Houston prosecutes nearly 900 sex traffickers a day (if working 365 days a year), has since been removed by the editorial squad at Dallas Morning News. The update line notes that "inaccurate numbers" had been used and have since been deleted. (The original version [can be found here](#) towards the middle of the page.)

This amazing claim was [completely debunked by Houston criminal defense attorney Mark Bennett](#), who broke down actual prosecution stats and the possible rationale behind the Dallas News' decision to run with the 300,000/year claim.

Nobody seems to know where that 300,000 number comes from. (Maggie McNeill suggests a plausible [genesis here](#) and [here](#).) It's a couple of orders of magnitude less obviously wrong than the same number attributed to Houston, but still glaringly obviously wrong—if the wrongness of "300,000 sex-trafficking cases in Houston" were equivalent to getting smacked upside the head with a 2X4, "300,000 sex-trafficking cases in the United States" would be getting poked in the arm with a fork.

That's the hype. Here are the numbers.

In Harris County, according to [Texas Office of Court Administration statistics](#), 36,862 new felony cases were filed and 68,142 new misdemeanor cases were filed in 2012. So the total of all new cases filed in Harris County is nowhere near the 300,000 sex trafficking cases asserted by the Dallas Morning News.

Bennett speculates the DMN [may have just misquoted](#) Rep. Ted Poe, one of the sponsors of the bill.

Poe, a Republican from Humble, said sex trafficking rings prey on the large number

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of immigrant women and girls living in the Houston area and across Texas, accounting for a disproportionate share of the estimated 300,000 sex trafficking cases prosecuted each year.

As Bennett points out, there aren't even 300,000 federal prosecutions nationwide per year. 2010's report shows only **91,047 people being prosecuted in federal courts**, so even Poe's nationwide claim is demonstrably false. **Even more damning are these numbers.**

Federally funded human trafficking task forces opened 2,515 suspected incidents of human trafficking for investigation between January 2008 and June 2010.

Now, it's bad enough that one of the bill's sponsors would throw out an unresearched "statistic" like this while pushing legislation. But that's somewhat expected from our politicians, especially when they've got a horse in the race. But it's even worse when a journalistic entity not only takes this stat at face value, but makes it comically worse by severely reducing its scope from national to local.

Mistakes will be made occasionally. I understand that. But this one should never have made it past the first round of editing. Certainly Rep. Poe is partially to blame for this, but the paper's editorial team should know that presenting patently untrue claims as fact severely weakens its stance on the issue. Of course, coming out in favor of punishing sex traffickers is hardly a controversial stance, so it's likely the editorial didn't receive a thorough vetting before publication.

But letting this slip through compromises the paper's credibility and accepting Rep. Poe's "statistics" as fact indicates DMN is in possession of a faulty BS-detector, something no serious journalistic entity should ever let fall into disrepair.

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-  **PlagueSD** (profile), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 2:45pm insightful funny report

Everyone knows everything is bigger in Texas...Including numbers!!!
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-  **Ima Fish** (profile), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 3:01pm insightful funny report

Let's assume that it's true that 300,000 people are being prosecuted each year for human trafficking. If that is true, then why the heck do we need new legislation?!
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-  **Anonymous Coward**, Nov 25th, 2013 @ 3:04pm insightful funny report


What worries me about all this frenzy is not that real sex traffickers will got to jail or suffer some form of punishment but what is exactly the definition of a sex trafficker and how you identify those by means of the law.

Here is an hypothetical, to make sure that they can get the allegedly bad guys they lower the bar and make associating with the criminal equal to being the criminal, seems ok right after all who would associate with a know criminal?





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George Washington, Abe Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, WW1 and WW2 vets and going "your sacrifices mean nothing".

Ninja: I saw that 4,5 billion loss and smiled. I smiled even further because Brazil was almost signing with the US, like pens in hands

though I suspect that's only one most visible and bigger loss. American companies must be suffering tons of smaller losses that when you sum... will probably be bigger than that anyway I'll be back after xmas.. or not.. if not happy holidays fellow techdirtians, lots of food, booze and monies

cya

silverscarcat: And ninja disappeared in a puff of smoke.

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The problem is when the criminal is not known for it, then everyone who has been seen talking to that individual will also be labeled a sex trafficker.

Further this could end up like "for the children laws" where now people who piss at night anywhere where children frequent could be labeled a sex offender without ever directly abusing or sexually assaulting a child or the definition off a child by the justice department.

Maybe willfully spreading false numbers should be considered a crime too, I can think of at least one way this could be harmful for sex trafficking victims.

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4.  [Carl "Bear" Bussjaeger \(profile\)](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 4:01pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

Re:

My guess is that there are still one or two citizens wandering around outside of prison. Can't have those little goody two-shoes evading their "Three Felonies A Day".

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6.  [Anonymous Coward](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 5:01pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

Considering that John Cornyn is involved, the inaccuracies are not surprising.


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7.  [Anonymous Coward](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 5:07pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

Certainly Rep. Poe is partially to blame for this, but the paper's editorial team should know that presenting patently untrue claims as fact severely weakens its stance on the issue.

On the contrary, they absolutely should have presented the claim. Followed immediately by the obvious debunking of that claim. Simply deleting a ridiculous claim by a government official is really letting them off the hook.

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8.  [Anonymous Coward](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 5:24pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

Tim - Not to sound like I'm supporting the (unsupportable) claim of 300K prosecutions a year (of any kind) in Houston, but the comparison to federal prosecutions doesn't mean anything. Sure, there are fewer than 100K federal prosecutions a year (and fraction of those relate to sex trafficking). But as surprising as it may seem, way more crime is prosecuted in the states than at the federal level. So it's certainly possible that a single state, or even a single city/county, could prosecute 3 times as many of a particular kind of case as the entire federal system. It's just that, in this case, they don't.

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9.  [Anonymous Coward](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 5:37pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)


Re:

You are not the average reader.

Hell, even a half-bitten cheese sandwich has a better grasp of English and Math than you do. For fuck's sake, darryl, you're a solar panel engineer from Australia. Act like it.


Oh, wait. You can't, because you're a complete tard who likes raping the corpses of dead grandmothers with no Internet connection because the RIAA claimed she downloaded pornography.

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10.  [Anonymous Coward](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 9:16pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

300K? That's one hell of an orgy, babe pack your shit we're moving to Texas, yes now!

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11.  [Anonymous Coward](#), Nov 25th, 2013 @ 9:28pm [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

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Houston has a population of about 2.1 million. If 300,000 cases are prosecuted per year, apparently the entire population of Houston gets indicted for this once every 7 years.

On the other hand, we all know how prosecutors like to tack on charges. Maybe it's just one guy who they charged with 300,000 counts.

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12.  **Michael**, Nov 26th, 2013 @ 5:24am [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

a bill that would impose stiff penalties on these adult victimizers

EXACTLY what should happen to them.

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13.  **toyotabedzrock (profile)**, Nov 26th, 2013 @ 10:55am [insightful](#) [funny](#) [report](#)

Every statistic you read about sex crimes is overstated on purpose by groups trying to fight the traffickers. They know they are wrong but do not care.

So basically it is 1,257 per year in the entire US.

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