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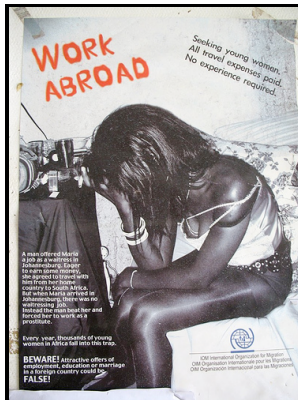
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## Super Bowl XLVI, Houston Texas and Sex Slavery - Human Trafficking. What do they have in common?

By Bob Price

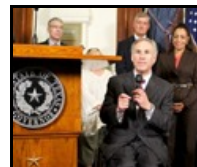
Just before last year's Super Bowl in Arlington, Texas, I posted **an article relating to human trafficking, sex slavery** and how those things connected to the Super Bowl. The Texas Attorney General, Greg Abbott, had weighed in on the topic calling the Super Bowl "a magnet for child sex traffickers". The story also discussed what was being done in Houston and Harris County which has become widely known as the Sex Slave Capital of the United States.



As we approach this year's Super Bowl in Indianapolis, I thought it would be appropriate to revisit the topic and see what has occurred in the past year. The first thing on this list? New laws passed by the Texas Legislature.

In this most recent legislative session, **Texas put more teeth into the state's statutes** regarding human trafficking. The penalty for a first offense (now a 1st degree felony) is now a minimum 25 years in prison. An additional bill was passed and signed by Texas Governor Rick Perry which makes it harder for human traffickers to make bond and imposes much tougher parole restrictions.

General Abbott, present for the bill signing, said, "Human traffickers use force, fraud and coercion to compel their victims into modern-day slavery." Abbott continued, "By increasing penalties for traffickers and continuing to foster cooperation among law enforcement, these measures will help ensure Texas remains hostile territory for human traffickers."



But what about Houston? What is going on in Harris County, Texas to break down these circumstances where women are forced into prostitution as either indentured servants or kidnap victims? Yesterday, I rode with Constable Ron Hickman, Harris County Precinct 4 Constable, as his deputies conducted a raid on a massage parlor in North Harris County.



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Hickman told me, "In many cases, these girls are in this country legally. Someone has helped them obtain legal visas and other documents to legally be in this county." Hickman continued, "In many cases we find out these women are paying off debts incurred by their process of coming to the US, or they are forced into slavery by duress of either threats against them or their families back home."



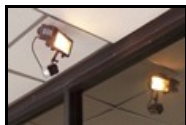
Does this look like a massage table? What goes on in this room?

Hickman's deputies don't go after these places on prostitution laws which are complicated and in many cases hard charges to make stick. Instead, they are employing a new tactic being utilized by other departments around the country. They are enforcing massage services licensing statutes.

Captain Skip Oliver said, "These are much simpler cases to make. First we prove they are offering massage services. Then, they either have a license or they don't." What I learned was that in most cases, neither the establishment, nor the girls are licensed. This makes for easily provable cases which can be prosecuted.

The ultimate goal is to build enough cases to enable the County Attorney's Office to come in and close the business as a public nuisance.

Yesterday's raid focused on a place called the "Diamond Spa" in the 16,000 block of Kuykendahl in North Harris County. It could just have easily been any number of other such "spas". But regardless of whether they call themselves a "spa" or "massage parlor" or a barber shop, if they offer massage services (or any of a large number of other regulated services), this law enforcement technique is proving to be effective.



Upon entry, the first thing I noticed was a very extensive security system. Very unusual for something proclaiming to be a health spa. Secondly, I notice no documentation anywhere of the required documentation. On this day, two women and one man were taken into custody. The

"manager" will be most likely charged with a Class A misdemeanor of operating a spa without a license. The "therapist" will most likely be charged with providing massage services without a license (Class C). The "therapist" also appeared to have expired ICE paperwork so she could have other problems as well.

Precinct 4 Asst. Chief Deputy, Tim Cannon, told me, "It is pretty rare to find illegal aliens in these raids. Most of the girls are legally here." I asked him how often they find women who admit they are "trafficking victims". He replied, "It doesn't happen very often. Every once in a while one will throw her hands up and claim to be a victim of trafficking."

I asked Cannon why this is when declaring to be a human trafficking victim is almost certain grounds



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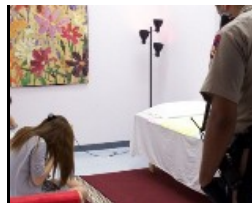
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human trafficking victim is almost certain grounds for obtaining a "T" immigration visa. Cannon said, "Most of the time these girls are under duress. Either their families back home, or someone they know here are being threatened if the girl talks or admits her situation. So, despite the big carrot of the "T" visa, most will not come forward. This makes it very difficult to build cases for human trafficking."



What I saw today was angering and sad at the same time. As you have seen in the pictures I took, these girls are living in deplorable conditions. The bed, pictured below, sleeps as many as four to six girls in one night.



I was told these spa's bring in about \$1,500 per shift, per girl. Many spas operate 24 hours per day. Now this isn't the only money involved. This is just the door fees paid to the "house" when the client enters. After that is the fees paid to the girl which might run anywhere from \$40 to \$200 per session depending on the services requested. The door fees alone can total up to a half million dollars a month from just one spa. Many own up to as many as four or five.



These raids often bring rewards of much more value than just the arrests. In today's raid Cpl. Ernest Gonzalez showed me a notebook full of phone numbers that could lead to other trafficking victims and the suppliers of these women. "This is the key to the vault," Gonzales said. "Information like this supplies the building blocks for making

much bigger cases."

I learned the County Attorney's office is having difficulty because these spas all use one single attorney to represent their cases. He keeps up with the latest techniques used by law enforcement and is ready with either a defense or a stalling tactic. The stall tactic allows the "owners" to reorganize making prosecution even more difficult.

By looking at the setup in the rooms, it is clear what is going on here. One room had only a bed, no massage table. Another had a massage table and a couch. Each room had a shower and one "shower room" had a vinyl covered bed for who knows what kind of action.



This spa was equipped with a well-stocked kitchen, an exceedingly large number of tissue paper boxes and a laundry which was being repaired when we arrived because of overuse of the machines for washing towels and sheets.





A kitchen and well stocked refrigerator

This place seemed clean, but Constable Hickman assured me in most cases that is not what they find. "Because of all the cooking and living conditions, these places usually have a very distinct odor."



At the end of the day, life in the spa business goes on and these trafficked girls continue to be shipped across the country. I saw one of the luggage bags with a recent tag showing its owner had flown in from Phoenix. This is their life. One sad place of existence after another.

Constable Hickman and his team are to be commended. Over the past several years, they have made **hundreds of arrests**. His department's **website details the activities** in these spas and their efforts to shut them down. Many of these sites have been shut down. Some pop back up just as quickly under a new name with new ownership. This a cash cow business. But for these victims of human trafficking, it is a hell-on-earth experience.

One thing that impressed me about Hickman and these operations is the efficiency upon which these are conducted. Hickman told me, "I do all the work on these Massage Parlors, Game Rooms and Curbstoning (unlicensed flipping of used car titles) with just two employees! I cut out bureaucracy and overhead in our department and manage to provide these services

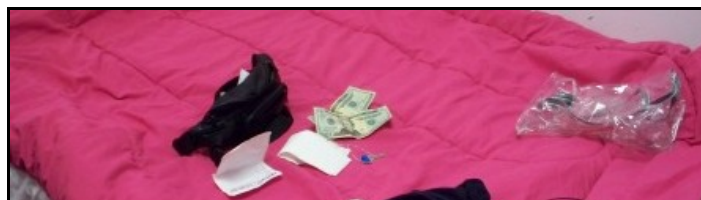


while cutting costs." In these times of tight budgets, this fits well with conservative principles of reducing the size and cost of government.

Hickman would like to encourage our readers to get involved in helping stop these human trafficking and sex crimes spots. If you would like to report illicit or suspicious massage parlors, please follow this **link to his department's website** and make a report.

I will continue to follow this topic and report what I find as it comes up. This is but one example of human trafficking. But it is not just sex slavery. It includes the construction industry, restaurant business and many others. If you know of any related information on this topic, please contact us directly to investigate.

Please come back here for more information as we uncover the dark truth that stains Texas and this beautiful city.





By **Bob Price** at Jan 24, 2012 9:16 AM

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