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SIoux FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA



## S.D. target: Sex traffickers

### Task force formed to address growing problem in state



Brendan Johnson

By John Hult  
jhult@argusleader.com

A task force established this month will use state, federal and local resources to tackle the problem of sex trafficking in South Dakota. U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson announced the formation of the task force Thursday at his office in downtown Sioux Falls, saying the problem has grown serious enough in South Dakota to warrant the same level of collaborative effort used to fight methamphetamine and child pornography.

The message to those who feel trapped by the sex trade, Johnson said, is that they are victims, not criminals. The message for those who use force, fraud and coercion to turn a profit through prostitution in South Dakota is that the business is not welcome. "If you engage in human trafficking, understand that this task force, that law enforcement, will be behind every corner, and we will drag you to justice," Johnson said.

See **TASK FORCE**, Page 5A

#### ONLINE

Watch the news conference about sex trafficking. Watch Brendan Johnson on "100 Eyes at 3 p.m. Monday." @ARGUSLEADER.COM



#### INSIDE

Sioux Falls man gets life in prison for sex trafficking. 3A



Robert Ruf is part of an effort to polish up the USS South Dakota monument at Sherman Park in Sioux Falls. The monument will be sandblasted and power washed and concrete repainted before a June 27-29 reunion of U.S. Navy veterans. JON WALKER / ARGUS LEADER

#### ONLINE

Hear about the exploits of the USS South Dakota in battle @ARGUSLEADER.COM

## MEMORIAL GETS A FACE-LIFT

### Sandblasters, power wash this weekend

By Jon Walker | jwalker@argusleader.com

Navy veterans meeting in Sioux Falls next month for the USS South Dakota reunion will retell stories about sea battles and their battleship's unique role at the end of World War II.

They also will be talking about whether this reunion will be their last.

Whatever they discuss, a new and improved, shiny version of the battleship memorial will greet them if Robert Ruf has his way. He is assisting an effort to spruce up the monument that sits at the north end of Sherman Park in west Sioux Falls.

He and several businesses are hoping to sandblast, power wash and repaint the concrete and steel monument before the June 27-29 reunion.

See **USS SOUTH DAKOTA**, Page 5A

#### BATTLESHIP DETAILS

» The USS South Dakota battleship memorial is at the north end of Sherman Park at 12th and Kiwanis in Sioux Falls.

» A spruce-up with industrial equipment will be this weekend, with local businesses doing the work. » Volunteers can help afterward with cleaning and touch-up details. Those interested may contact Robert Ruf at ruf@one@aol.com or 951-3588.

» The crew's reunion June 27-29 includes a band concert and public program at 10 a.m. June 29 at the memorial.

» Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. through Labor Day. » Support for the cleanup is available at [www.giveforward.org](http://www.giveforward.org).

» A virtual tour of the museum is at [www.ussouthdakota.com](http://www.ussouthdakota.com). » Details on the crew are at [www.ussdakota.com](http://www.ussdakota.com).

## Report: Swifter justice in Indian Country

### Prosecutions up 54 percent

#### Staff and Wire Reports

Native American leaders who for years have criticized the federal government for the way authorities handled major crimes on reservations can mark progress with the release of newly tracked statistics from the U.S. Justice Department.

The number of Indian Country cases charged in federal court has increased by 54 percent between fiscal years 2009 and 2012, from 1,091 cases to 1,677 cases, according to a DOJ report released Thursday.

"They've taken their responsibility much more seriously than before," said Brent Leonhard, a lawyer with the Umatilla tribe in Oregon.

The report marks the first look at government investigations and prosecutions on tribal lands. It comes as a result of the 2010 Tribal Law and Order Act, which requires the Justice Department to publicly release such figures.

"Until recently, there has been a great lack of accountability on the part of the federal agencies carrying through with their responsibility to investigate and prosecute violent crimes on our reservations," Sen. John

ONLINE Read the complete report by the Department of Justice @ARGUSLEADER.COM



John Thune

## Analysts: Medicare costs may keep declining

By Kelly Kennedy  
USA Today

WASHINGTON — Innovations adopted and accelerated by the 2010 health care law will continue to force down overall Medicare costs, according to industry analysts and studies, even as the economy continues to improve.

Those changes include new payment plans, improved efficiency and a move toward consumer-driven insurance plans that started before the law's passage. They influenced the \$618 billion drop in projected Medicare and Medicaid spending over the next decade that was reported May 15 by the Congressional Budget Office.

That report showed that costs for the two programs in 2012 were 5 percent less than projected in early 2010, and the CBO data are expected to foreshadow the spending projections in the annual Medicare trustees report scheduled to be

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See **CRIME**, Page 4A

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# Task force: Anti-prostitution

Continued from Page 1A

The task force includes representatives from the Minnehaha County State's Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office, the Sioux Falls Police Department, Division of Criminal Investigation and Department of Homeland Security.

Those agencies now are committed to passing along information relating to prostitution to one another in the interest of targeting those who lure teens and young women into the sex trade and use coercion and threats keep them there.

"The severity of this crime is such that a task force is necessary," Johnson said. "We (in South Dakota) don't care who gets credit for these cases."

The U.S. attorney cited the 2009 case of Brandon Quincy Thompson, whose operation targeted underage girls and advertised them for prostitution on backpage.com as an eye-opener for many in the state.

Since then, dozens of other victims have come forward, and seven other people have pleaded guilty or been convicted of sex trafficking-related charges.

"The debate about whether we have a problem in South Dakota is over," Johnson said. "All

that's left is to determine how to handle it."

One of the perpetrators, 37-year-old Carl Campbell, was sentenced to three consecutive life prison terms just hours before the news conference. Thompson also was sentenced to life in prison.

Johnson's office has also targeted Johns, such as former Sioux Falls doctor Josh Payer, a frequent customer of Thompson's. Two other men, Daron Jungers and Ronald Bonestro, were charged with sex trafficking after a sting operation in which they answered ads, posted by law enforcement, that advertised sex with minors.

Those cases were overturned in the U.S. District Court of South Dakota, where a judge ruled that sex trafficking statutes did not apply to those who buy sex, but Johnson's office appealed the decisions to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals and won.

The cases set a precedent that can now be cited by other federal prosecutors who choose to target buyers.

Cases that don't make it to the federal courtroom can end up in state court. Minnehaha County State's Attorney Aaron McGowan talked about his office's collaboration with federal and local agents to mine the phones seized in the Thompson investigation

for the names of Johns.

Those Johns were indicted in state court last fall. As of Thursday, 16 of the buyers indicated in state court on solicitation charges have pleaded guilty, McGowan said.

"We have been able to hold perpetrators accountable at every level of government," he said. McGowan also agreed with Johnson's message to the women and teens involved in sex trafficking: They are victims, not criminals, and that they'd be treated accordingly once they come forward.

"Justice is not getting a pot conviction for a young victim of sex trafficking," McGowan said. "Justice is getting the perpetrators at the top."

The victims in sex trafficking rings are often young and vulnerable to suggestion, manipulation and coercion based on a history of abuse, drug addiction, homelessness and a number of other factors, Johnson said.

Prostitution is offered as a lifestyle they're afraid to leave, he said. Many worry they will be prosecuted.

Johnson encouraged anyone who suspects sex trafficking to be taking place, including motel or business owners who see suspicious behavior, to contact local law enforcement.

# USS South Dakota: Sprucing up before reunion

Continued from Page 1A

Ruf, 51, said the spruce-up is the least they can do.

"It's not only local. It's a national landmark. If we don't keep it going, shame on us," he said.

It also might be the last they can do.

The reunions, once a sure thing to bring 200 veterans to Sioux Falls, have fallen on hard times. Attendance dropped to 18 in 2011.

"This year, we expect 10 to 15," said organizer Cathy VerSchelden of Buffalo Grove, Ill.

The group meets every two years.

"The last six years they have been saying, 'This is the last one,'" VerSchelden said. "Then they keep asking me to do it again."

Ruf, an oil paint artist and water consultant for Culligan, served in the Navy from 1987 to 2002. He estimates the spruce-up to cost \$50,000. He said supporting businesses will cover most of that in the donated or discounted services, but he figures the effort still needs \$10,000.

The effort is in conjunction with the battleship memorial foundation.

"We've put a lot of years on the memorial. It's very important to keep it in the best condition we can," said Harlan Bedford, 70, foundation vice president and a retired Navy officer who served in the submarine service during the Vietnam War era.

The battleship memorial, in place since 1969, always has left much to the imagination. The original ship, which sailed from 1941 to 1947, was scrapped in 1962. Representing today is a concrete wall stretching in a long oval along the Sherman Park grass to provide an outline matching the ship's perimeter. Inside the perimeter are remnants of the ship, along with a museum and a series of plaques retelling its mission. A stroll

on the grounds gives a sense of the scale of war. While the perimeter seems huge, the ship was home, a floating city, to 2,200 sailors at a time, a total of 6,600 during its short history. It earned 13 battle stars and lost 96 crew members killed in action.

Dennis and Judy Runser of Stiiwell, Kan., stopped to see it this week.

"It's a neat design to have a foot-print of the ship to give you a good feeling for its size and history," Judy Runser said.

The spruce-up will include a power cleaning, then a coat of primer and two coats of paint, Ruf said. The heaviest work will be Saturday and Sunday. After that, volunteers can help with touch-up work and cleaning the grounds, he said.

Maguire Iron, A&B Concrete, Jerke Construction, Culligan, Nyberg's Ace and Disabled American Veterans are among those helping.

"It's a good project, right up our alley. We sandblast and prepare metal and concrete for painting," said Randy Thompson, mechanic shop supervisor at Maguire, a business that builds and maintains water towers.

"We'd like to see the battleship stay in good shape. A lot of people come to town to see it for the history," said Bill Schaefer, co-owner with Austin Dybvig at A&B Concrete in Crooks.

The Navy launched the USS South Dakota from Camden, N.J., in 1941. The year the U.S. entered World War II. In battle, it took on a mystique of the unsinkable that a plaque at the memorial explains.

"The smoke created by the firing of over 100 anti-

aircraft guns made the South Dakota appear like she was on fire. The Imperial Japanese Navy reported on two different occasions that they had sunk the South Dakota. For security reasons, she was thereafter referred to as Battleship X."

Some battleships became floating museums after the war ended in 1945, but the Navy mothballed the South Dakota in 1947 before scrapping it 15 years later. The parts saved and shipped to Sioux Falls include the most, radar equipment, anchor chain, gun mounts and propellers.

Battleships were given state names and filled with sailors from across the country. One was VerSchelden's father, Larry Maday, an Illinois teenager who quit high school to join the Navy in 1943. They fought several battles in the Pacific as the U.S. closed in on Japan. One memory still shimmering is the USS Missouri was in Tokyo Bay when the war ended in 1945, but that the USS Missouri, bearing the name of President Truman's home state, became the site for the surrender.

"South Dakota crew members were upset over it. It's been a thorn in their side the last 70 years," he said.

Reunions served a higher purpose, as well.

"The ship was a city within itself, but with 2,200 guys aboard, many didn't know each other till they started going to the reunions," VerSchelden said.

Her father was a regular with till his death in 1997. She estimates 380 crew members remain, all age 88 and older, but most don't travel.

The spruce-up is an effort to honor the men and their memories and to preserve a community resource, Ruf said. He estimates the work now should protect the memorial another 15 years.



Robert Ruf said.



U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson talks Thursday about human trafficking in South Dakota. JAY PICKTORN/ARGUS LEADER

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