When it comes to violence against women, there is no “typical” victim. To solve the problem, we’ll need solutions that are far outside the box.

This week in New York, the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women is convening global delegates for its annual meeting. The priority this year? The prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women. Executive director of U.N. Women Michelle Bachelet has flatly declared: “Enough is enough.”

The world is watching. How are we going to address violence effectively, sustainably, and in a way that preserves freedom and returns stolen dignity to the women and girls of the world?

We need to look outside the box. Far outside. The real solutions lie on the periphery, in creative minds and unusual alliances.

Because when it comes to violence against women, there is no “typical” victim; the risk factor is simply being born female. There is no generation, race, culture, or socioeconomic group whose women and girls are immune to violence in its many forms: domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and harmful traditional practices. One of the most widespread violations of human rights, violence against women will directly impact one in...
three women living today, according to United Nations estimates.

If we have any hope of breaking through, we need to engage with bold thinking and new partners.

**Some of the most visionary women we know** are innovators who prevent violence against women, provide for survivors and those at risk, and proactively change culture that condones or ignores the exploitation of women and girls.

These women prove that creative, bold-minded individuals can do so much to stop this epidemic. But they also need the support of legislation and a fair judiciary. The Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at Cornell Law School is just one innovative program working with women judges across the globe to improve access to justice and eliminate violence against women and girls.

Indeed, to create a world where women and girls are safe from violence and exploitation, we need to align human-rights defenders, politicians, the business world, and the diplomatic community around practical, creative solutions. We can’t afford to wait any longer. It’s time we invest in women who are leading solutions on the ground and create a safer world for all.
I Was Beaten By Chicago’s Dirtiest Cop, Lawsuit Contends

Commander Glenn Evans is said to have infamously shoved his pistol in a suspect’s mouth, but Rita King’s story is far more terrifying. Evans has already cost the city $250,000 and hasn’t been fired—he’s been promoted.

At times, attorney Patrick Morrissey has trouble getting a hold of his client. A homeless woman named Rita King for years has roamed some of the roughest neighborhoods on Chicago’s south and west sides, but the dangers she has faced on those streets are nothing compared to the beating she allegedly took two years ago at the hands of one the city’s highest ranking cops: Commander Glenn Evans.

“She has it in her head that this is the worst thing that’s ever happened to her,” Morrissey says. “And I can’t say I disagree.”

What went down that day in April 2011 inside the Chicago Police Department’s District 6 headquarters was an act of alleged brutality in line with others Evans has supposedly carried out during his 28-year tenure. And it’s one that is now
the focus of one of at least three lawsuits pending against the man and the city that employs him.

“They knew that Evans was the guy to call to use excessive force,” Morrissey says.

And that, King contends, is exactly what the 28-year Chicago police veteran used against her.

While Hollywood has romanticized the image of the vigilante cop who gets results by stepping outside legal lines, the real world isn’t as glitzy—or as easily managed. Often times it’s not Dirty Harry going after a gun-wielding psycho, but cops padding stats by racking up arrests. In the case of Evans, it’s dozens of complaints and hundreds of stories of violence carried out by someone charged with protecting and serving. For King the movie theater fantasy of renegade cop worked to frighten and physically injure a woman who was brought in following a domestic conflict with her boyfriend—a woman who, by her own lawyer’s admission and the judgment of the cops who dealt with her before Evans entered the room, is mentally unstable.

Evans was a lieutenant in charge of the District 6 lockup facility where King was being held on charges of simple assault and disorderly conduct. A man listed as King’s boyfriend, Jeffrey Morris, told police he had been threatened. King supposedly told her 46-year-old partner that she was “going to stab him in the neck with a pencil,” burn down his house and set fire to his car. She was brought in to District 6 to be fingerprinted and processed. Handcuffed to a wall, according to a deposition given by one of the officers in the room that day, King resisted attempts to have her fingerprints taken. She didn’t get physical, though, instead requesting a transfer to the District 5 lockup facility, where women are usually processed for arrest. That wasn’t possible, she was told—a statement that would be mirrored later when Evans allegedly said he didn’t want to waste his officers’ time by taking King to the hospital, where she would be diagnosed with a fractured left orbital bone. At some point, one of the cops determined King was “high, drunk, or had a mental illness,” and summoned Evans.

“They knew this guy is just an aggressive, ruthless police officer who isn’t afraid to do things like this,” Morrissey says.

Evans used a “pressure point control technique,” one of the officers testified in his deposition. That’s one way to put it. Another is that Evans manhandled King by shoving her nose upward, telling the now-40-year-old that he would push her nose “through her brain,” she says. The immediate results of Evans’ police work were a broken eye socket and one of the more unsettling mugshot photos you’ll see. But his actions that night did not result in any investigation by the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA), to whom King complained.

“They really didn’t do anything about this investigation until after two years, until Ms. King finds me and we file a lawsuit for her,” Morrissey says.
Since his career began in 1986, Evans has been the subject of at least six lawsuits, an investigation by WBEZ Chicago found, and more than two dozen complaints of excessive force. All told the city has doled out more than a quarter-million dollars of taxpayer money to defend the 52-year-old—part of more than $500 million in police misconduct claims over the past 10 years, according to the Better Government Association. But Evans’ brand of police work is an especially dirty one, if you believe the likes of King and others who’ve brought suits against the city. Evans, like those before him, may be the latest in a long line of Chicago cops who’ve bent the rules—in their minds to keep the city safe. Burge’s actions, which included torturing suspects with cattle prods and other electronic devices to solicit false confessions, are well known. And while Evans’ supposed sins may not be as severe, if true, they may represent the continuation of practices that have served to dehumanize members of the black community in Chicago.

“Over there at 63rd and College Grove, I talked to guys up there,” says Paul McKinley, a native of the city’s south side and an outspoken critic of Evans, Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel. “And they said Glenn Evans will take you up to the cemetery, throw you in an open grave and tell you he is going to kill you.”

While McKinley’s grim vision is almost surely an exaggerated street story, threats of death and bodily harm apparently aren’t far from the truth when it comes to others who have ended up on Evans’ bad side. One of those is Rickey Williams, the most recent Chicagoan to file suit. As a result of his accusations, and the ensuing investigation, Evans was charged with aggravated battery and official misconduct for sticking his gun into Williams’ mouth and shoving a taser into the south side man’s crotch after he ran from Evans and other cops. Williams, who says he was spooked and fled after Evans pulled up in a cruiser and stared at the 24-year old for no apparent reason, was never charged with anything as a result of his interactions with police that day. With his gun in Williams’ mouth, Evans allegedly screamed “Where’s the guns?!” according to court documents.

At the time, Williams had none.

“No words can describe how afraid I was when the gun was pushed in my mouth when I knew I didn’t do anything wrong,” Williams said through his attorney, Antonio Romannuci, at a Sept. 9 press conference announcing the lawsuit.

But before Williams went to the IPRA with his complaint, McKinley and others in the “grass roots black” community began working to bring attention to the story.

“He was so scared and shook about...
this, we couldn’t find him,” McKinley says of Williams.

His fear wasn’t unreasonable. After complaining to the IPRA, the agency in charge of investigating accusations of police misconduct, including the 176 police-involved shootings that have taken place since 2007, Superintendent McCarthy ignored their recommendation to suspend Evans. In fact, McCarthy did the opposite.

“Rahm Emanuel and McCarthy gave him a promotion after that,” McKinley says incredulously, noting that Evans was promoted to a district commander position after his encounter with Williams. “And nobody done a story on this motherfucker.”

That would soon change, though, thanks to WBEZ Chicago’s investigation and other media attention following the Aug. 24 deaths of Roshad McIntosh, 19, and DeSean Pittman, 17. Both lived in neighborhoods under Evans’ control. And when McKinley and others marched on Evans’ District 11 headquarters, they were 1,000 strong.

“It’s certainly a tragedy that these young men were killed by white police,” McKinley says, mimicking remarks made the day of the march, “but it was a black commander that set the tone for this type of behavior.”

That behavior is brutal, King, Williams, McKinley and others contend. But according to Morrissey, the lawyer who tracks down King when she doesn’t have a cellphone, Evans’ conduct is not only condoned, but at times encouraged.

In addition to suing for excessive force, Morrissey is attempting to hold McCarthy and other top brass in the police department and city government to task for allowing an apparent culture of savagery to run rampant behind the blue wall.

“They promised to give me his promotion papers,” Morrissey says. But the city has balked on that agreement, recently filing a motion that may prevent the release of that paperwork, as well as halting questions Morrissey wants to direct at high-profile cops in a legal environment.

“They don’t want the superintendent coming down to my office to testify about Evans,” he says.

For her part, King has rejected settlement offers pushed her way from the city. The promise of a payday isn’t enough for his client, according to Morrissey.

“She’s standing up and saying police can’t do this to marginalized people,” he says.

Flint Taylor, another Chicago attorney whose office is responsible for compiling two lists of police officers accused of excessive force, and who helped take down the brutal former CPD Commander John Burge, agrees with Morrissey that the problem is an institutional one. Heavy-handed police work like that carried out by Burge and, apparently, Evans, gets results. And sometimes, results are all that matters.
“He’s the African-American Burge,” Taylor says of Evans. “That’s what the superintendent wants, that’s what the mayor countenances. They want the stats, they want to make it look like they’re fighting crime. The method doesn’t matter. The method is doing whatever it takes. Once in a blue moon the disciplinary agency actually recommends that someone’s badge be taken away and that it be suspended. But what’s wrong is it’s coming from the top.”

In a city with its fair share of racial tensions, one might think the meteoric rise of Evans—from street-level gang detective to high-ranking administration member—is representative of an evolving relationship between law enforcement and the black community. Not so, says McKinley.

“Ain’t no white or black when you dealing with the Chicago police,” he says. “The Chicago police is all blue.”

Since being charged criminally for throttling his handgun into Williams’ mouth, Evans has been placed on desk duty, his annual salary of $154,932 intact. Emanuel has skirted questions about Evans, and McCarthy has defended his decision to promote the commander in a statement that read, in part, “The alleged actions, if true, are unacceptable to the residents we serve and to the men and women of this department.” Prior to that, McCarthy said Evans was “probably my favorite among my favorites” and that the commander did “wonderful work.”

Rita King likely would have disagreed with that sentiment when Evans entered the lockup room in back in April 2011. As the other three officers turned their backs, Evans went to work.
Escape the Room—New York's Hottest Game

You and your buddies are locked in a room. Your mission: to get the hell out of there. How did this game become one of the most popular nights out in NYC?

If there is anything the Saw franchise has taught me (yes, I’ve seen all seven), it’s that being locked in an unfamiliar room is really not the best situation to find yourself in—especially one with a clock counting down from 60 minutes. Yet, last Friday night, I found myself in this exact scenario, rummaging through drawers, tugging on furniture, and attempting to find even the smallest clue that might help me escape before my hour ran up.

Granted, I entered this on my own accord. I had signed up with five other friends for Escape the Room NYC, an immersive gaming experience that is quickly becoming one of New York’s top attractions. With two locations in New York City (Midtown and the Lower East Side), patrons can chose between five scenarios—Home, Agency, Office, Theater, and Apartment—of various capacities to solve riddles and puzzles hidden throughout the room.

The Home version that I entered can host up to six people. Its Victorian decor is reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes’ abode. Dusty books, smoking pipes, tarot cards, and a Ouija board fill the antique furniture positioning any object as a clue. There are also suspects, evidence, and a few hidden chambers that hold vital tools to help advance closer to the hidden key.

The inspiration from the game stems from Internet games, such as Toshimitsu
Takagi’s Crimson Room, that began appearing online in the early 1990s. In Crimson Room, players awoke in an unfamiliar room with no way of knowing how to escape. Clicking objects revealed subtle clues to lead you out. Similar web-based games spawned before hundreds began appearing in App stores for mobile phones: Can You Escape, Forever Lost, and Dr. Stanley’s House, to name a few.

“It’s now an entire sub-genre of video games,” Escape the Room’s creator, Victor Blake, told The Daily Beast. “They all have their own spin and their own puzzles. I thought a real-life version of this would be awesome.”

Last summer, Blake began brainstorming ideas for his very own version—Escape the Room NYC, which launched as a pop-up last November. In its 10-month run, the attraction has risen to No. 3 on TripAdvisor’s top attractions for New York, beating out almost every Broadway show (the Carole King Musical is #2), museum (The Frick is #1), and every other attraction the city has to offer. Even Sleep No More, the sensational interactive theater based on Macbeth, sits at #124.

“They guys paved the way for us,” Blake said of Sleep No More’s production company Punchdrunk. But where the immersive performances of Sleep No More, Queen of the Night and Then She Fell introduced a new form of entertainment, allowing spectators all access to every aspect of the show, they do not encourage an active, personal investment, something Blake finds essential for this type of entertainment.

“We build the games where it’s not about the individual puzzles,” he said “It’s about that emotional arc. It’s about the timing and the reason that you feel frustrated. And the release of solving that next step.”

The further I advanced in the game, the closer I found myself on the brink of giving up (if not a complete emotional meltdown). The clues became more complex. The possibilities grew. Time continued to dwindle down. At one point, when an elaborate code was displayed on the walls of a secret second room, my frustration on not being able to solve it as the time ticked down to 10 minutes almost prompted me to start turning over furniture and ripping the sockets out of the wall—which I was specifically advised NOT to do. (People have caused electrical shocks affecting the whole facility by putting objects into outlets.)
If it wasn’t for our guide, who sat watching from the control room and sent helpful hints the more we struggled, we may never have gotten as close to getting out as we did. The satisfaction from solving each clue made the game that much more exciting.

“I want people to win and I want people to have good time,” Blake revealed, adding that only 15-20 percent of participants actually escape. “But that’s the sort of up-and-down that makes the game so fun.” Where we thought we had almost escaped in the first 20 minutes, other rooms get that feeling with 10 minutes left, realizing they still have further to go.

With its success, Escape the Room is now evolving from what Blake compares to an “Off Broadway” production to a fully-fledged spectacular. Lighting designers and sound engineers are working with set and game designers to create even more realistic scenarios for the three additional outposts they plan to open, beginning with Philadelphia on Wednesday, and two more in other U.S. cities before the end of the year.

Despite it frazzling my brain, I’d have to go along with the TripAdvisor contributor who commented, “It’s the most fun you can have in an empty room.”
Women have emerged as the greatest fundraisers in this electoral cycle, particularly on the Democratic side, upending the old myth that they were no good at that side of politics.

One of the most persistent myths in politics—that women shy away from campaigns because they don’t “have the stomach” for fundraising—is taking a beating this election cycle as women have emerged as top money makers, both for their own campaigns and on behalf of other candidates and national campaign committees.

For Democrats in particular, the names most in demand to headline events for candidates around the country are almost all women—from Hillary Clinton to Nancy Pelosi to Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, and most especially, First Lady Michelle Obama.

When asked to pick the three names he’d want for an ideal Democratic fundraiser, longtime DNC committeeman Robert Zimmerman named Mrs. Obama and Bill and Hillary Clinton.

“Those three stand above the traditional partisan debate and have a reach that runs past politics and can touch people in a very personal way around the issues,” Zimmerman said, adding that the first lady has a particular talent motivating Democratic audiences. “She has such a personal way of connecting with an audience—it’s very unique and special.”

Although she has a reputation for shunning the rubber-chicken circuit, the first
lady has actually headlined nearly 30 events for Democrats on her own this cycle, including 24 fundraisers for the DNC and four for individual Senate candidates. With her 61 percent approval rating and a talent for connecting with women and minority audiences in particular, she is uniquely able to go into states where even the president and vice president struggle to motivate voters and donors.

Case in point: Georgia, where the first lady appeared last week with Democratic Senate candidate Michelle Nunn for a voter registration rally and fundraiser.

“Michelle Nunn does not want to be caught within camera range with the president right now,” said Charles Bullock, a longtime professor of political science at the University of Georgia. “The president could raise funds in the state, but for Democrats there would be a question whether it would be a net gain to do so. It would simply underscore the Republican message that that ‘Michelle Nunn will be Barack Obama’s senator, not yours.’ The first lady does not present that problem to the same degree.”

Democrats declined to say how much money Mrs. Obama has raised for Democrats this year, but without question, no Democrat has been more prolific than House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, who has raised $80 million for Democrats this cycle and more than $400 million in the last 12 years.

Although Pelosi is often the center of Republican attack ads against House Democrats, she is a superstar when it comes to motivating large donors in her own party.

“Somebody like Nancy Pelosi is perceived as far more partisan than the first lady and far more liberal than many voters,” said Jennifer Lawless, the director of the Women & Politics Institute at American University. “But when you look at a pool of potential donors, they look just like her. She’s the kind of person they want to hear from.”

In addition to Pelosi, and other surrogates, Democrats point out that a number of their Senate candidates are prolific fundraisers in their own rights. The top three highest-grossing fundraising quarters for any Democrats this cycle belong to women—Sen. Kay Hagan in North Carolina, Kentucky hopeful Alison Lundergan Grimes, and Georgia’s Michelle Nunn,

Hagan and Nunn are also significantly out-raising their male opponents. In Hagan’s case, she is swamping Republican Thom Tillis, with $16.7 million raised, compared to Tillis’ $4.7 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Nunn has nearly twice as much as her Republican opponent, David Perdue, with $9.2 million to
Perdue’s $5.8 million.

On the GOP side, Michigan Republican Terri Lynn Land has pulled in $8.7 million, compared to her Democratic rival, Rep, Gary Peters, who has raised $6.9 million. But other female candidates for the Republicans are not faring as well. Monica Wehby in Oregon and Joni Ernst are both trailing their Democratic opponents’ totals and no woman has emerged nationally for the GOP as a go-to surrogate in the way that the first lady or Nancy Pelosi have in 2014.

“Part of the problem for Republicans is that they don’t have a lot of high-profile candidates this time,” said Jennifer Lawless. “My hunch is that when you look at their most competitive races, women are not necessarily in the mix this year.”

Until women sit in the highest ranks of Republican leadership, it will be hard for GOP women to match Democrats like Pelosi and Hillary Clinton’s fundraising dominance, Lawless said. Their gender is not part of the problem.

“Although nobody likes doing it, study after study shows that men and women are equally successful raising money once they become candidates,” she said. “The notion that women don’t like to raise money is a myth. Plenty of men hate it, too.”
How Iran Could Become Our Shadow Enemy in the Syria ISIS War

In Iraq, Tehran was our silent partner, working to break an ISIS siege and edging out Maliki. But it’s not in Obama’s new coalition—and may try to destabilize U.S.-led efforts in Syria.

At the big table in Paris where 24 world leaders met Monday to discuss a war plan against ISIS, one nation was notably left out. But Iran claims it didn’t want to be there anyway, with supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei calling American pronouncements about ISIS “absurd, hollow and biased.”

Behind the tough talk, however, is a fear that American aims in Syria will threaten Iran’s regional power while strengthening its adversaries. In the fight against ISIS, what’s at stake for the U.S. is the risk that an area of strategic interest will be further destabilized and that American lives will be put in danger. For Iran, the enemy is already on the doorstep. Iran sees ISIS as a threat not only because of its extreme violence and targeting of Shia but because defeating the group could expand the power of its Sunni rivals and challenge Tehran’s claim for dominance of the region.

The U.S. and Iran have been dancing around ISIS since American airstrikes began in Iraq more than a month ago. In the latest series of steps, the U.S. excluded Iran from its burgeoning anti-ISIS coalition, Iran said it had already rejected an earlier invitation to cooperate, and finally, the U.S. said it would consider coordinating with Iran in the future. But if the rift with Iran widens, it could become a shadow enemy in Syria as the U.S. begins its war there.
Before the latest break, Iran had been acting as America’s silent partner in Iraq. American airpower was critical in breaking the ISIS siege of Amerli, a Shia town in the Sunni region of central Iraq, but it supported ground forces led by Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, an Iranian-funded militia group. And shortly after American aircraft carried out their part of the mission and left the scene, Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force, posed for a photo-op with his proxy forces, who claimed their victory owed nothing to the U.S.

In addition to American airstrikes supporting Iranian militia forces, Tehran was likely instrumental in pressuring the sectarian prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, to step down and allow a new government to be formed. Without an official alliance and despite rhetoric and PR moves distancing Iran from the U.S., the two countries had avoided jeopardizing the momentum generated by their convergent interests.

But for both nations, the calculations in Syria are different. Iran sees ISIS forces massing not far from its border in Iraq as a direct threat. The civil war in Syria, however destabilizing, doesn’t immediately threaten the homeland. And while the U.S. has largely acted alone in Iraq, expanding the war against ISIS to Syria will rely on Sunni states that are Iran’s traditional enemies.

Iran’s main concern in Syria is losing its closest regional ally if the U.S. and its Sunni allies back rebels to fight against ISIS and the government forces of Bashar al-Assad. Through Syria, Iran’s power reaches Hezbollah in Lebanon, extending its sphere of influence from Tehran to the Mediterranean. If Assad falls and a new government is formed by Sunni rebel forces, Iran loses a keystone in its regional power structure. What’s more, if rival Sunni states play a key role in Assad’s fall, Iran’s regional rivals will be strengthened even as its own power is undermined.

The conflict created by Iran’s fear of losing Syria, and the U.S. conviction that defeating ISIS requires attacking it there but not cooperating with the Assad regime, broke out in public Monday.

On Friday, Secretary of State John Kerry said inviting Iran to the Paris meetings “would not be appropriate, given the many other issues that are on the table with respect to their engagement in Syria and elsewhere.” He added Monday that bringing Iran to the table would have prevented the inclusion of key Sunni states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In response, Ayatollah Khamenei described listening to American statements about ISIS as “really amusing” and “a hobby” that kept him...
entertained while he was being treated recently for prostate cancer. “What was really amusing is that I saw the American secretary of state and his spokesman explicitly say, ‘We will not invite Iran in a coalition against [ISIS]...It is a source of pride, not a source of disappointment.”

After Khamenei made those remarks, Kerry left open the possibility of future cooperation: “Just because Iranians were not invited to the Paris conference doesn’t mean that we are opposed to the idea of communicating to find out if they will come on board or under what circumstances or whether there is the possibility of a change.”

In step with the rhetoric coming out of Tehran, Iraq’s president, Fouad Massoum, followed with statements in support of the Iranian regime. In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, he expressed disappointment at Iran being left out of the Paris meeting and said it was “not necessary” for Sunni states in the U.S.-led coalition like Saudi Arabia and the UAE to conduct airstrikes against ISIS.

As the U.S. has taken leadership of the war against ISIS, it has entered the broader regional conflict pitting Shia states like Iran against the Sunni powers with which Washington is now allied. American policy has sought to avoid the appearance of taking sides in the religious schism but risks being seen as backing Sunnis even as it marshals forces to confront ISIS, the most virulently sectarian Sunni group in the region.

As Iran showed in the last war in Iraq, when it armed and backed insurgent groups fighting U.S. forces, having a common enemy, as Saddam Hussein once was, won’t prevent Tehran from trying to counter American influence in the Middle East.

For Iran, the question is what comes after ISIS. In Iraq there is already a Shia-led government in Baghdad broadly aligned with Tehran. But in Syria, where Shia are a minority, a post-ISIS future threatens to freeze Iran out.

To defeat ISIS, the U.S. is relying heavily on Sunni coalition partners to give its aims local legitimacy and ensure that constructing the post-ISIS political order won’t fall solely to America. Fearing the loss of its power, Iran could try to destabilize U.S.-led efforts in Syria, causing a protracted conflict that would weaken the allied participants. Alternately, if Tehran resigns itself to Assad’s ouster, it may seek other means to maintain its influence in Syria. One option would be controlling the political transfer of power from Assad, to ensure that the new government installed in Damascus remains receptive to Iranian interests. Then there’s the real long shot: that Iran reaches a détente with its Sunni rivals and accepts a power-sharing arrangement rather than a client state in Syria.

Whatever course Iran pursues, it will have a say in the fight against ISIS and the future of Iraq and Syria, with or without a seat at the table.