

Opinion: Reid's prostitution stance is all about bitter politics

By David Colborne

At 14.6 percent, nearly 5 percent higher than the national average, Nevada has the highest unemployment rate in the nation. Consequently, when Harry Reid, Nevada's senior politician in Washington and the current Senate majority leader, came to address the Nevada Legislature on Tuesday, his focus was, logically enough, on jobs. He discussed how many jobs his support for the stimulus package from two years ago had saved, noting especially how much money went directly to Nevada's teachers from the stimulus. He highlighted his efforts at bringing clean energy companies to the state and how many jobs that would bring in.

Then he suggested that Nevada, the state with the highest unemployment rate in the nation, should abolish an industry.

Thirty years ago this year, Storey County became the first county in Nevada to officially license and regulate a brothel, starting with the infamous Mustang Ranch. Now, Nevada's safe, well regulated brothels employ hundreds of women, providing a substantial boost to the local and regional economies and tax bases that they serve. Every year, for example, each brothel in Storey County is required to furnish at least \$75,000 a year in licensing fees – each brothel effectively pays the entire salary, including health and retirement benefits, of one school teacher, and that doesn't even include property or sales taxes. Brothels also exhibit a salutary effect to the tourism industry, providing yet another unique attraction to advertise that's only available in Nevada. They do all this while maintaining the safest working conditions for

prostitutes and their customers in the country, if not the world, with regular screenings for sexually transmitted diseases and a consistent application of the same labor and safety laws followed fastidiously by every other legitimate business in the country. Consequently, drugs, diseases, and pimps might all be common ailments of illegal streetwalkers, but they're unheard of among the employees of Nevada's legal brothels.

How would abolishing this industry bring jobs to Nevada? It wouldn't, unless you relied upon the anecdotal evidence of one senator, who quoted a single, unnamed businessman that was mortified that brothels were legal in Nevada. According to Sen. Reid, there are legions of parents and businessmen who fear that their children will see a brothel on their way to school; this is curious since less than 10 percent of Nevada's 2.7 million people live in a county with a licensed brothel present. Surely the longest serving senator for the state of Nevada could point these parents and businessmen toward any of Nevada's brothel-free urban school districts, including the ones serving Carson City, Reno, or Las Vegas?

Of course, Nevadans know the real reason why Senator Reid wishes to end legal prostitution in Nevada – it's politics, pure and simple. Nevada's rural counties failed to support Sen. Reid, so he wants to cut their economies off at the knees. Even when Nevada's unemployment rate is the worst in the nation, Sen. Reid can't help but put petty, partisan politics above the needs of his constituents.

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