



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 28, 2011

Senator Harry Reid Says Nevada Should Close Brothels

Nevada's Democratic U.S. Senator, Harry Reid, said his state should close its brothels. Nevada currently is the only state where prostitution is legal and licensed, with the state government overseeing the industry.

Speaking before a joint session of the Nevada state legislature on February 22, Reid addressed record unemployment, bankruptcies, and foreclosures in a crumbling state economy founded in large part on tourism fueled by gambling and the side businesses like prostitution that thrive along side it.



If we want to attract businesses to Nevada that put people back to work, the time has come for us to outlaw prostitution, the liberal Democratic senator declared, adding that when the rest of the nation thinks about his state, it should think about the world's newest ideas and newest careers not about its oldest profession.

Reid, who squeaked out a fifth term in a close election last November, focused on job creation, education reform, and renewable energy in his speech to state lawmakers, but also gave a nod to tourism, which he said will always be Nevada's biggest industry but it can't be our only one. When it comes to quality of life in Nevada, Reid intoned, parents don't want their children to look out of a school bus and see a brothel, or live in a state with the wrong kind of red lights.

As reported by the [Associated Press](#) (AP), Reid received a smattering of applause when he first suggested Nevada outlaw bordellos, but as he got further into the topic his remarks were met with silence from the representatives of a state whose identity is woven tightly with gambling, alcohol, quick marriages, and prostitution.

In the early 1970s Nevada's notorious Mustang Ranch east of Reno became the state's first legal, licensed state establishment dedicated to prostitution. Now brothels operate in outlying areas around the state, paying local jurisdictions assorted fees that can be a significant portion of their budgets, the AP reported. They are outlawed in five counties, however, including those encompassing Las Vegas and Reno.

Following Reid's speech, Nevada's other U.S. senator, Republican John Ensign, weighed in on the issue, saying he thought the industry should remain legal in his state, with counties continuing to decide whether or not brothels would be allowed in their jurisdictions. Likewise, Reid's fellow Nevada Democrat in Congress, U.S. Representative Shelley Berkley, nixed the Senator's proposal, telling the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, If these counties want to tolerate it, tax it, regulate it, and license it, I don't see it as my job to tell them what to do when it comes to legal prostitution. As Nevadans, we are no strangers to criticism about what goes on in our state, and this issue is no exception.

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), political observers believed Reid's remarks were the first time he had spoken out on the topic. This is a complete shock, said Barbara Brents, a professor at the University



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of Nevada-Las Vegas, who has studied the states prostitution industry and said she had discussed it with Mr. Reid.

Equally shocked was longtime state brothel industry lobbyist George Flint, who was quoted by [Politico.com](#) as saying, The mystery in all of this is what in Hades got Harry off on this issue. Ive known him for 42 years. Weve been friendly for 42 years. He has always been a real level-headed individual as it relates to the practicalities of the way we handle the worlds oldest profession in Nevada.

Added Reno brothel owner Lance Gillman, Its really perplexing because Ive known Senator Reid, done business with Senator Reid for years. His choice here is really unusual.

The *Wall Street Journal* noted that Reid, who is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints (Mormons), maintains conservative Mormon values personally but has long tolerated Nevadas legal sin industries and is a powerful advocate for casino firms.

Indeed, in his autobiography Reid tells of growing up in Searchlight, Nevada, outside Las Vegas, where his mother did laundry for more than a dozen local brothels, and where he learned to swim in the pool of a local establishment.

Some observers suggested that Reids sudden disdain for his states unseemly industry was tied to suggestions that some state lawmakers might try to resurrect a proposal to tax brothels as a way to address the states multi-billion-dollar budget deficit, a move that could lead to an expansion of prostitution to urban areas where it has not existed before. Two years ago, the brothel industry urged a \$5 tax on acts of prostitution as the legislature tried to close a budget gap, reported the *Journal*. Advocates said it would raise around \$2 million annually.

Rachel Weiner of the [Washington Post](#) suggested several other possible reasons that might explain Reids sudden repulsion for a vice he has tolerated most of his life. In addition to the obvious motivations, including his stated opinion that prostitution is bad for business in Nevada, or that the Senator may be falling in line with his Mormon convictions, Weiner added a pair of political possibilities.

Brothels are powerful in rural areas, and Reid only won one of Nevadas 15 rural counties in the 2010 election, wrote Weiner, quoting brothel owner Dennis Hof, who told a Reno newspaper, It looks like to me that this is his payback, this is our punishment. OK, you dont want to vote for me? Fine. Then I will take away your brothels. I will take away your income. That is what it looks like to me.

Another possibility is that Reid is using the issue as a means of sabotaging his Republican counterpart, Senator Ensign, whose admission last year of marital infidelity has seriously threatened his hopes for reelection in 2012. Noting that Ensign, who is an evangelical Christian, thinks individual counties should decide the fate of legalized prostitution, Weiner observed that the controversy only gives Democrats a chance to remind voters of Ensigns sex scandal as the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee did in an email blast on Thursday afternoon two days after Reids speech.

Regardless of his motivation, political observers noted that Reid chose the wrong side of an issue that is off-limits in Nevada, and he is standing more or less alone on the platform. Reported the [New York Times](#), Even State Senator John Lee, a Democrat from North Las Vegas who is one of the Legislatures most vocal critics of prostitution, said that he was not inclined to introduce a bill banning brothels and that such a bill would have little chance.

Perhaps GOP state Assemblyman Ed Goedharts enthusiastic observation reflects the entrenched



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acceptance Nevadas citizenry has toward their states legalized reprobate sex trade. According to the *Times*, Goedhart insisted that brothels speak to the states history of rugged individualism. It shows werent not just another cookie-cutter state. We relish the fact that whenever anyone else is zigging, were zagging. We dont need to have a bureaucratic version of utopia. The last free place in this country is Nevada. We should celebrate that.



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