

# NEVADA COALITION AGAINST SEX TRAFFICKING

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE THURSDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2011 (3 pages)**

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## **NEVADA ANTI-TRAFFICKING COALITION APPLAUDS REID'S STAND AGAINST LEGAL PROSTITUTION**

### ***Will State Legislators Remain Silent?***

The Nevada Coalition Against Sex Trafficking (NCAST) applauds Senator Reid's opposition to legal brothels. The negative economic consequences of legal prostitution worries Reid. Nevada can't afford to lose business opportunities.

He's right. Legal prostitution (and the sex industry generally) is bad for legitimate business, bad for communities, and it's terrible for the women inside the brothels. Progressive and ethical entrepreneurs tend to avoid states that support pimping.

Nevada's legal brothels cost the counties a lot. Legal brothel revenue does not cover the expenses incurred in monitoring and licensing legal brothels and dealing with the increasingly organized crime associated with any kind of prostitution, legal or not. (1)

Who will come out in support of alternatives for the women in the brothels? Who will break ranks with the pimps and traffickers?

In past years, there have been a handful of politicians, businessmen, and public servants who have come out against legal prostitution. Like Reid, Nevada casino developer Steve Wynn took a stand against legal prostitution before the Nevada legislature in 1988: "We have outgrown legalized prostitution," said Wynn. The existence of brothels in Nevada is just one more item that out-of-state media people use to denigrate the quality of life in Nevada...It is not good for Nevada's image to have ...legalized 'cat houses' and the sooner we put that image behind us, the better we will be." (2)

Nevada's culture of prostitution originates with the legal brothels and expands into a vast illegal sex industry. Legal brothels serve as a magnet and a cover for a burgeoning illegal sex industry. The state is now considered the epicenter of North American trafficking by many in law enforcement. "The existence of legal brothels leads to sex slavery," stated John Miller, former Ambassador at Large on Modern Day Slavery and former Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking (U.S. Department of State) and former Republican Congressman from Washington.

Democratic Assemblywoman Sheila Leslie, D-Reno said in 2003 that Nevada has been "penalized for our legalized prostitution." Leslie, who objects to prostitution because it exploits women, said her attempts to get the National Network for Youth to hold its conference in Reno failed because of the group's objection to the state's lax prostitution laws. (3)

"Prostitution is an inherently corrupt enterprise that violates numerous fundamental human rights. It the oldest and most persistent form of slavery in the world" said Candice Trummell, Republican and former Nye County Commissioner and Executive Director of the Nevada Coalition Against Sex Trafficking.

In Nye County, the political corruption that accompanies legal and illegal prostitution is blatant. Wearing a wire at the request of the FBI, Trummell caught pimp Joe Richards red-handed with video and audio of him attempting to bribe her. She stated, "In Nye County, if you are a pimp who contributes to politicians, you can confess to attempting to bribe an elected official, then keep your legal brothel license and even be thanked for your contribution to the community."

After hearing Reid's proposal to eliminate legal brothels, former FBI agent Roger Young was reminded of Nevada Governor Richard Bryan's (1983-1989) attempt to hold the Annual Conference of Governors to Las Vegas. Another state's governor refused to come to Nevada because of legalized prostitution. Young investigated many cases involving pimps who trafficked women from other states to legal brothels in Nevada. Because the brothel was legal, he found it difficult to make a case against the pimps. Young also observed cases of legal pimps recruiting women and johns from high schools. Legal prostitution is recognized by many as being bad for development, (4)

A Nevada legal pimp bragged in 2006: "We contribute to both Democratic and Republican campaigns."

The effort to end the violent sexism of legal prostitution should be a bipartisan campaign with public officials rejecting campaign contributions from pimps who are based in legal brothels, strip clubs and escort prostitution.

The Nevada Coalition Against Sex Trafficking calls on the state legislature to immediately schedule hearings on the negative impact of legal—and illegal—prostitution on the Nevada economy and on the lives of too many women and men, girls and boys.

## FOOTNOTES

(1) Some subscribe to the myth that legal brothel prostitution keeps economically strapped rural counties afloat. Others have challenged that assumption with evidence from county budgets. Former Nye County Commissioner Trummell said, "Many people believe the brothels contribute significantly to our economy, but they don't. We have six brothels and we receive a total of \$180,000 in fees." Trummell estimated that the total 2005 brothel revenue was less than 1% of the entire county budget.

Similar observations have been made in other Nevada counties with legal prostitution. According to Churchill county newspaper editor Josh Johnson: the county Comptroller found that in 2004, "the cost of related law enforcement expenses exceeded revenue obtained from prostitution. The county was, in fact, subsidizing the industry..." Josh Johnson (2007) Legal Prostitution is an Antiquated Joke. Lahontan Valley News and Eagle Standard. April 7, 2007. Retrieved July 27, 2007 from <http://www.lahontanvalleynews.com/article/20070407/OPINION/104070039&SearchID=73288452865482>. Johnson is editor of the Lahontan Valley News and Eagle Standard in Fallon, located in Churchill County, Nevada. Brothels are legal in Churchill County but none have been in operation since 2004.

Furthermore, the income generated from fees and licenses in Nye County did not appear to cover the expenses of regulating the brothels. Nye County Sheriff Anthony De Meo said he needed 30 more deputies in 2005 just to keep up with the crime in the county and in order to sufficiently regulate the brothels. De Meo said he would need to hire an additional 2 full time investigators as well. (Nye County Nevada May Outlaw Prostitution (2005) Retrieved March 12, 2007 from <http://www.swop-usa.org/news/NyeCounty.php>.)

(2) Letter sent by Steve Wynn to all Nevada state senators and assembly members in 1988. Quoted by Alexa Albert in Brothel (2001) New York: Random House, page 180.

(3) Article by Erin Neff. "Legalized Prostitution: Vegas brothels suggested - Goodman remarks open debate on downtown red-light district." Las Vegas Review-Journal. October 24, 2003.

[http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj\\_home/2003/Oct-24-Fri-2003/news/22438503.html](http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2003/Oct-24-Fri-2003/news/22438503.html)

(4) There are regular skirmishes between mainstream business interests and brothel owners regarding the locations of brothels which some fear will scare off legitimate business in the state. See Susie Vasquez (2002) Dermody files suit to halt brothel construction in northern Storey County. Nevada Appeal February 2, 2002. Accessed March 10, 2006 from <http://www.nevadaappeal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?Date=20020202&Category=NEWS&ArtNo=202020103&Ref=AR&template=printart>.

For further information on Nevada prostitution, both legal and illegal, see [Prostitution and Trafficking in Nevada: Making the Connections](#) (2007) by Melissa

Farley. The book is based on research supported by the U.S. State Department Office of Trafficking in Persons.