

Meth, domestic violence top list of concerns for Nev. AG

By Nancy Oliver Hayden

STATELINE – The room was so quiet one could have heard a pin drop when Nevada Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto started talking about the myriad issues in the Silver State.

“The first of many issues in Nevada is the methamphetamine problem,” she said. “Very few people knew it was a problem when I first took office.”

She brought agencies together to address the issue and now the state is moving forward regarding methamphetamine as well as other drug abuse problems.



Catherine
Cortez Masto

“The No. 1 problem in Nevada is prescription drug abuse and now there are synthetic or designer drugs. This is a challenge because there are more than 500 formulas for synthetic drugs and we have to investigate each one separately,” she said.

Masto and her office created the Drug Round-up program, where people can bring their unused prescription drugs to designated locations to be incinerated. They also established a Substance Abuse Task Force.

Masto, a strong advocate for women and children, spoke about

women in leadership positions and discussed her programs and passions with Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe on March 23 at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.

After asking the audience how many knew what an attorney general did and only a few raised their hand, she acknowledged that not many others know either.

"The attorney general is considered the top law official in the state. We are the largest law firm, work closely with law enforcement and district attorneys, and investigate and prosecute criminal cases" she said.

Masto, a native Nevadan, said she ran for Nevada attorney general because she saw so many issues that needed to be addressed at the state level. She took the oath of office in January 2007 for her first term and was sworn in Jan. 3, 2011, for her second term.

Another issue facing the state is domestic violence, which impacts women and children as well as animals. Masto chairs the Domestic Violence Prevention Council.

"Nevada leads the nation in the number of women murdered through domestic violence. My office has put together a Fatality Review Team and we have a prosecutor on staff. There is a need to understand what it means to be a domestic violence victim. It includes a cycle of violence and is a control issue," she said.

The Attorney General's Office has established a Prevention Partner program, where employees partner with groups such as Girl Scouts. Called Peace Begins at Home, the girls learn where they can find out more information and where they can go for help. The office is also looking to partner with the Boy Scouts, Board of Cosmetologists and Nurses Association.

One of the issues Masto plans to focus on in the next four years is how juvenile offenders are handled on the state

level. She said this is an issue that has never been studied. When she worked as assistant county manager for Clark County she assisted in the creation of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative to build a better legal system for juveniles.

The attorney general is passionate about issues of elder abuse and exploitation of seniors. Because she was so close to her grandparents while growing up, she saw the problems that seniors experience.

“Nevada has a growing senior population and we will continue to work on these issues,” she said.

Missing children in Nevada is a concern for her office. Investigators travel all over the world to locate non-custodial parents. Human trafficking is also a problem as children are forced into prostitution and Nevada doesn't have programs to address these issues.

“We don't have a safe place for these young girls to go. We arrest them and put them in jail to keep them safe and then they go back into the same environment. We are trying to get funds to establish a home for them in southern Nevada,” Mastro said.

“Also an issue is cyber safety. Kids are on the Internet, it is an extension of their being, and there is no control,” she said. “Young people need to be educated about cyber bullying, sexting and protecting their identity on line. Face Book pages are used by sexual predators to gain their confidence to sexually exploit them.”