

Opinion: Time to swing for the fences in Nevada

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

Watching the predictable, partisan reaction to the national unemployment rate and the jobs report last week made me wonder if people in Nevada know just how bad we have it.

We can only dream of 9.1 percent unemployment here. The last time we were that low? George W. Bush was languishing as a lame duck, then-Gov. Jim Gibbons was preparing to call a special session to deal with a budget shortfall and Dina Titus was basking in her victory over Rep. Jon Porter.

A political lifetime ago.

Unemployment in Nevada is now at 12.4 percent, actually down from nearly 15 percent late last year. Why? I have no patience for the pointless partisan blame game, especially here where neither Republicans nor Democrats have provided the leadership to help cushion Nevada's economy when national recessions hit or chart a reasonable path forward.

But have no fear. Unlike that dysfunctional Congress with unprecedented unpopularity, in Nevada the parties united to revamp the economic development structure so businesses will flock here. Or not.

So as the state's seminal industry looks to China, two Nevada cities (North Las Vegas and Reno) edge toward a financial precipice and the mining industry prepares to celebrate its tax-free, \$1,600-an-ounce golden year at Lake Tahoe, it's hard to see how far we've come in 25 years, much less since unemployment was at 9 percent in those halcyon, late days of 2008.

Don't misunderstand: Gov. Brian Sandoval taking the lead on economic development through the celebrated Assembly Bill 449 and bringing in some fine minds, especially entrepreneur Steve Hill, may make some sense. But all that bill does is change the structure (sorry, Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki) and try to consolidate the disparate economic diversification elements.

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