

# Illegal sex trade threatens Nev.'s 'oldest profession'

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

On lonely highways from Pahrump to the state capital, you can still find signs of a rare and controversial business as old as the mining camps that helped put Nevada on the map. Just follow the trademark spinning red lights.

While recent decades have seen casinos sprout from coast to coast, Nevada still holds the distinction as the only state where brothels are legal.

Lately, though, this regulated version of the world's oldest profession seems a little long in the tooth.

"There's just nothing that's really working for this unique little industry," said George Flint, longtime lobbyist for the Nevada Brothel Owners Association. "I hesitate to say this, but I think legal, regulated sex for sale is on its way out."

The culprit isn't moral opposition or government interference, although U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid did call for an end to legal brothels during a speech to state lawmakers in 2011. What's really killing the houses is unfettered competition from illegal prostitution set loose on the Internet and the Strip, Flint said.

Clark County is one of five Nevada counties that prohibits brothels, and it is the only one barred from the practice by state law. But thanks to an endless barrage of handbills, mobile billboards and phone-book ads promising women on demand, many tourists – and a fair number of locals – are under the mistaken impression that prostitution is legal everywhere in the state, not merely at approved establishments far from its largest cities.

Flint said legalization is the only viable way to curb the rampant illegal sex trade in Las Vegas – a billion-dollar criminal enterprise he said the Strip resorts seem content to ignore or tacitly encourage in the name of customer service.

Replace “the exploiters and the pimps” with some legal, closely regulated bordellos, he said, and the county could bring in as much as \$500 million in annual tax revenue while helping to curb crime, disease and the victimization of underage girls.

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