

Reid leaves Searchlight a richer man

By Rosalind S. Helderman, Washington Post

SEARCHLIGHT – Harry Reid grew up in a shack in this dusty old gold-mining outpost in the middle of the desert.

As he rose to political power, he amassed personal wealth and began living part time in a condo in Washington. But he never stopped holding tightly to a gritty public persona grounded in his Searchlight roots – building a house here and keeping the town his official residence.

Along the way, a tiny town that thrived only briefly during a gold rush more than a century ago gained bragging rights as home to the most powerful man in the U.S. Senate.



Sen. Harry Reid sells Searchlight property to gold mining company. Photo/LTN file

But this month has brought a remarkable turn of events for Searchlight and its population of a few hundred: A new gold rush has reignited investor interest here. And Reid, whose land quite literally sat on a gold mine, has seized the opportunity to cash out of the town at the center of his

political identity.

He announced last month that he had sold his house along with 110 acres of Joshua-tree-dotted, rocky land to Nevada Milling and Mining, a small South Dakota company that bought an abandoned mine next door in 2010 and has high hopes for a new era of gold production.

The \$1.75 million deal was a handsome payout for the Democrat, who is paid a Senate salary of \$193,400 per year. Nearly all of the land had been in Reid's family for decades, much of it originally deeded to his father and some bought by Reid from family members. His brother will continue to live in Searchlight, where Reid will also retain some holdings.

Reid, 74, said he and his wife, Landra, wanted to be closer to their children and grandchildren, as well as his political base in Las Vegas, an hour's drive across the desolate Mojave Desert.

Now Reid, who as Senate majority leader is presiding over the Democrats' efforts this year to retain control of the Senate and looking ahead to his own potentially difficult re-election in 2016, will need to adjust the carefully tended life narrative he has presented to voters since he entered politics in the late 1960s. And Searchlight is pondering a new but possibly brighter future without its native son.

"We're all very, very sad to see Harry go," said Reggie Doing, 32, whose family owns the Searchlight Nugget Casino and Restaurant, which offers 10-cent coffee, \$1 beer and is the town's main gathering place. But he said the return of gold mining marked by the sale could renew the town. "Nothing is guaranteed and nothing is forever. Change can be a blessing."

A video that Reid recorded to break the news of his land sale to constituents shows the senator lovingly describing Searchlight trinkets he keeps in his Washington office, including an old miner's helmet with a carbide lamp. "Even

after all these years, you can still smell the carbide,” he said, sniffing the item.

“Searchlight is my birthplace, it is my home, my favorite place in the world,” Reid said in a statement provided to the Washington Post. He called the sale a “a very difficult decision.”

The return of gold mining to Searchlight is part of a new rush throughout Nevada made possible by a spike in gold prices following the economic crash of the last decade, when gold was thought to be a safe investment in a volatile financial world. The price of gold soared to over \$1,900 an ounce in 2011; it has now settled back to about \$1,300 an ounce, still a historically high price.

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