

Obama says Reid is 1 of Senate's greatest leaders



Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., has been working on Lake Tahoe issues for decades. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Scott Sonner, AP

STATELINE – Sentimental? No. Tough? Yes.

A credit to Nevada and his country? Absolutely.

That's how President Obama describes Sen. Harry Reid as the Nevada Democrat's 30-year career in Congress winds down.

"I'll miss Harry, even though he's not a sentimental guy," Obama told a crowd of about 7,000 this week at the Lake Tahoe Summit at Harveys.

The president shared a story about Reid's telephone habits familiar to most who've known the son of a hard-rock miner over the years.

"Anybody who's ever gotten on the phone with Harry Reid, you'll be making conversation, and once he's kind of finished with the whole point of the conversation, you'll still be talking and you realize he's hung up," Obama said to laughter.

"And he does that to the president of the United States," he said. "It takes you, like, three or four of these conversations to realize he's not mad at you, but he doesn't have much patience for small talk. "

Reid, who is retiring at the end of this year, is a "tough" character whom Obama believes will "go down as one of the best leaders the Senate ever had."

"I could not have accomplished what I accomplished without him being at my side," the president said. "So I want to say publicly, to the people of Nevada, to the people of Lake Tahoe, to the people of America: I could not be prouder to have worked alongside the Democratic leader of the Senate, Harry Reid. "

Obama made his first ever visit to Tahoe for Wednesday's summit at the request of Reid, who also persuaded President Bill Clinton to attend the first such summit in 1997.

Obama said Reid has been an environmental champion not only for Nevada, but the entire nation.

"Right after I took office, the very first act Harry's Senate

passed was one of the most important conservation efforts in a generation. We protected more than 2 million acres of wilderness and thousands of miles of trails and rivers. That was because of Harry Reid," Obama said.

Reid was the driving force behind the creation of the only national park in Nevada, Great Basin National Park near Ely on the Nevada-Utah line, he said, as well as the protection of more than 700,000 acres in the Basin and Range National Monument Obama designated last summer.

But his environmental legacy may prove to be the efforts he put into bringing together dispirit interests to begin to reverse a dramatic loss of Lake Tahoe's famed clarity.

"Two decades ago, the senator from Searchlight trained a national spotlight right here, on Lake Tahoe," Obama said. "And as he prepares to ride off into the sunset ... this 20th anniversary summit proves that the light Harry lit shines as bright as ever."