

Casino Connection

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On My Way to Carson City

Tourism brings many advantages to Nevada

by **Bill Bible**



Every two years, in the month of February, 63 legislators and throngs of advocates make their way to Carson City for 120 days to help determine the Silver State's future course. This February is no different, but fortunately for me, you and your neighbor, the state's largest industry, tourism, is strong and delivering the tax dollars the state depends on to help fund education, transportation and various other public services.

As many of you may already know, the Nevada Resort Association is the primary voice of the tourism and gaming industries at the Nevada state legislature. And, as in years past, the members of the NRA recognize that paying our fair share of taxes provides us the privilege to operate in Nevada. We appreciate Nevada is a unique place where our brand of gaming and hospitality can thrive. But let us not forget the fragility of our industry, state and state budget.

After the attacks on 9/11, Nevada's gaming and hospitality industry felt the effects through a decrease in visitor volume. Many of our friends and coworkers found themselves with reduced shifts or even out of work. As gaming companies adjusted in 2001 and 2002 to compensate for lost revenues, the 2003 legislature scrambled to raise state funds quickly as the previous two years did not provide the expected revenues. You see, the state budget is heavily dependent on the health and vitality of the gaming and tourism industry. Almost 50 percent of the state's general fund is directly affected by how much money is brought into the state by tourism. The heavy dependency has its rewards and its dangers, as 2001 and 2002 showed.

In turn, my job is to help protect the industry, its companies and employees from legislation that may adversely affect the successful, but delicate balance we have experienced for many years. My role on behalf of the industry is to be an educator and advocate. I help educate each legislator about the gaming and resort industry and the synergies between the industry and the state's financial health. We want to help address the needs of Nevada residents in the most comprehensive way possible while advocating the interests of our industry and

various communities.

As I make the trek up to Carson City this year, Nevada gaming and tourism has rebounded from the lows we saw in 2001 and 2002. Thanks to the gaming and tourism industry, the state once again has a surplus of revenues. Although the legislative calendar is shaping up to be uncharacteristically quiet, a lot can happen during the 120-day session.

In this past election, the voters of Nevada decided to make sure education is funded, but with a new twist: the legislature must approve education funding prior to any other fiscal need. Various groups representing higher education, transportation and healthcare (among others) will be lining up to ask for a portion of the tax surplus.

Many of our fellow Nevadans are not yet aware that we are currently celebrating Nevada's 75th anniversary of wide-open gaming and how gaming has allowed Nevada to evolve into a multifaceted world-class destination. But the NRA plans to spice things up during the session by celebrating the 75th anniversary through various ways including recognizing how your hard work, every day, makes the Nevada we enjoy possible.

Bill Bible is the president of the Nevada Resort Association. Bible has a long history with the state of Nevada and the gaming industry. He has served as a controller for Nevada, the chairman of the state Gaming Control Board, and a member of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission.