

An Exclusive Interview With Senator Richard Bryan Part II

This is the second of three parts of an exclusive interview held with U.S. Senator Richard Bryan.

Sentinel-Voice: Yesterday you joined, along with Congressman Bilbray, Mayor Lurie and others, in a summit meeting called by Senator Harry Reid to address the continually growing traffic and transportation problems in Southern Nevada. What was your feeling on the outcome and usefulness of that meeting and I would like to know if the problem of the very inadequate bus transportation for the local residents was addressed during the meeting.

Senator Bryan: Why don't I say what I think the benefit of it was. I think the message came across pretty clear to the local and the state, the county and the city's Regional Transportation Commission, we at the federal level are singularly unprepared to do the planning for you in the sense of what roads do you want improved, what inner changes do you want built, what new traffic control systems do you want to implement to ease the traffic problems? Those are the things that are best addressed at the local level, but it requires the coordination of everyone. On the other hand, the federal government is withdrawing in terms of its historic responsibilities in providing highway road funding and I introduced a series of charts yesterday to prove that. I've got a bill in, that will require the federal highway trust fund monies to be released to the states, so that they can continue with these programs and accelerate them. I think that's been a useful dialogue, but the one thing from the local perspective that I think came out of this is that we're not going to be able at the federal level to fund it all. And yet, what is not helpful is for every government in the Valley to come up with its own proposal. The City of North Las Vegas wants this intersection, Clark County wants this road, the City of Las Vegas wants this kind of modification on the 'spaghetti bowl', or whatever. There's got to be some kind of a unified planning process in the urban core, if you will, so that when these officials come back to Washington, they're not all over the ballpark. They'll say, look, we've agreed here in the County. I say the County - I mean generically, I don't mean the political portion of the County versus the incorporate city limits... and here are what our priorities are, A, B, C and D: will you all in the Congress help us get the money to do so, and I'm sure that our answer will be 'we'll do everything possible. I think that will be very helpful. Your second question was on the bus situation. There was not direct mention of the bus situation, but we did have a very impressive witness that Senator Reid invited from Los Angeles. He made the point which is true, that in terms of public transportation in a municipal or metropolitan area, that it is dependent upon being subsidized, that there is not a system in the country that operates just on, as they say, the fare box, that is, the monies that are collected from the riders. We haven't reached that decision yet in this community. It was on the ballot for increased sales tax to go to public transportation, but that was rejected by the public. So my own opinion is that in order for us to get better public transportation, which is sorely needed, there's going to have to be some public money in that, and the public is going to have to pay for that. At this point they haven't been prepared to do so. The only major route that draws any real revenue in terms of making a high profit is the Strip route, and the other routes that expand out from the Strip don't do much as far as that's concerned. So we have a very inadequate public transportation system - terrible.

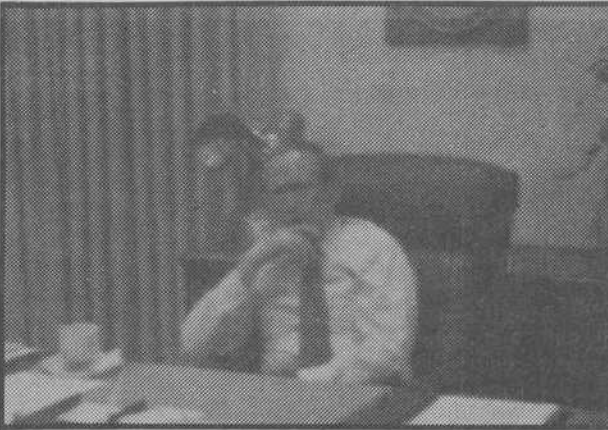
Sentinel-Voice: Senator, what steps have you taken to secure the Stealth Bombers in Nevada?

Senator Bryan: Well, as you know, the proposal is to remove the Stealths from Tonopah to Hallerman Air Force Base in New Mexico. I've just got back literally, just about 10 or 15 minutes before you arrived, from Tonopah, where I took a look at the situation. I think I'm only the fourth Senator ever to go up and make a tour of that Tonopah base. It's going to be a tough one to keep it here in Nevada. The operational expenses are high because it's remote and people are flown in daily. I don't mean that they're flown in every single day, or flown out every single night, but there's a series of flights on a 727, which is a good sized commercial air line and the operational costs are enormous. But the delegation is working to put the department of Air Force position justified as to why it would be cheaper to move that to Hallerman Air Force Base. So it seems that the delegation is pretty much working

together.

Sentinel-Voice: What impact does, if it does move, this have on the economy in Nevada?

Senator Bryan: Well, it certainly will have a negative impact in the sense that it puts a dent, but, I mean, as strong as the economy has been, now I don't think it's going to be overwhelming. This economy is growing so rapidly that it would probably not have the long-term adverse effect. . . unfairly, it's going to be putting some people out of jobs and that would be unfortunate.



Senator Richard Bryan

Sentinel-Voice: What specific plans or goals do you propose to address the problems confronting the economically depressed areas of the district which you represent? And, of course, I'm speaking mainly of the Westside?

Senator Bryan: Well, I think some programs that you've talked about that were inactive last year, in terms of the Community Redevelopment programs, programs that recognize certain areas in our community as being eligible for economic assistance, I think those kinds of programs are very helpful; legislation that requires, you know, those who are lending monies to disclose the turn-down rate, and the other thing, to put pressure on lenders to be more responsive to the needs of the minority community and those who are less well off economically, to begin with. Those are all programs which I have supported and will continue to support.

Sentinel-Voice: What can we do about unemployment that is so critical?

Senator Bryan: Well, unemployment often times, as you know, is a function of not having the right job skills. Our society requires increasingly sophisticated job force and there's many youngsters as well as those who are not so young, who simply have no job skills. So we have been supportive over the years of programs like JTPA and others to provide job training for youngsters and those who are making their way into the work force, so that we can keep America moving and get these people good jobs that have skill levels which they will find to be marketable.

Sentinel-Voice: Of course, we know that one of the big problems now is, it seems as though we do have youths who could benefit by such programs, but in many instances, we have to be realistic and say that they're not taking advantage of it, because they feel they could make more money doing other things, for instance, selling drugs. What can we do about that?

Senator Bryan: Well, I think the most effective thing that we can do now is to step up our educational programs. I just think it's a frightening prospect and, you're right, there are many ghetto youth and not to categorize one particular group, but there are many ghetto youth who, the lesson they've learned is that they can do a lot better by violating the law and trafficking drugs, and indeed the money there is enormous. Somehow, we've got to get that turned around. Tough law enforcement's just a part of it. Educational opportunities are starting to become a part of it; rehabilitation programs are a part of it, and I suppose strengthening family attitudes. And I do think that's one thing that's hurting us badly, that's the disillusion of the family, and turning particularly in the black community, not to suggest that they're the only segment in our society in which the family values system seems to unravel, but the historic strength of the family unit, I think, has been more impacted by poverty and economic disadvantage and ghetto living conditions. I think the black community has been more personally affected and in a wider sense, than any other member of the community, although the trend is generally throughout society. That's true even in the upper

middle, upper level income families, where the family unit has been undermined and I think that hurts us. But it's really hurt us most in the poor communities, it seems to me.

Sentinel-Voice: During your years as Governor of Nevada and now as a U.S. Senator - and I've heard this question bounced around a lot, so I'm going to ask it, because it's on some people's minds - you have never had an African-American male on your staff. Many people want to know why that is.

Senator: Well, really I guess the answer in part is that I've always been very enamored with the work performance that women have done. I suppose that if one looks at my staff, generally irrespective of ethnic background, in the governor's office my chief of staff was a woman, the person who ran the Las Vegas office was a woman, my press secretaries, then until Jim Mulhall broke the string, were women. And I look at the number of people in the governor's office and Karen Zupon was my press secretary and before her Karen Gallitz... Down here the staff consisted of Jenny DeVoe and Rita Myer and Rhoda Erbeck. Every person in the Southern Nevada office was a woman, and in fact, I believe until Clint Hollings came aboard and Fernando, the rest of the staff here in the Las Vegas office were men. I mean, we've got Rhoda, Brenda (Williams), Sarah, Lou and only two guys, so I guess I've been enormously impressed with the quality of work that women do and they have served me so well, so I guess that would be the reason. I'm not discriminating against men, it's just that I've been very impressed with the women who have come to work for me. Oh, I would add that I've been able to, we did have a number of, for example I look back at some of the appointments that we've made and in fairness, a number of the appointments that we have made were males, and ethnic minorities, from the cabinet levels to the personal staff level. And Bernice (Moten), for example was on my staff up in Reno until she relocated down here, and John was my director of personnel... and you know, I've had such people that had worked with us over the years as Booker Burney and others you may know personally, that have been appointees of mine. But as far as personal staff, you're right, we're overwhelmingly females.

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