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## The Social Health of Nevada

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*Governor*

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# **The Social Health of Nevada\***

## **Keynote Address Delivered at the Justice & Democracy Forum**

**William S. Boyd School of Law, November 15, 2005**

### **Governor Kenny C. Guinn**

As governor, I want to commend you as you work together to improve the social health of Nevada. As a private citizen, I welcome and encourage your efforts to better educate Nevadans about improving our quality of life. And as a former corporation executive, I would offer this simple advice: If you are going to make any significant inroads, you must be able to not only bring the public sector to the table, you must also get buy-in from the private sector as well.

The comprehensive report being unveiled this morning, the *Social Health of Nevada*, is a tool that can be used to significantly advance the quality of life in our state. The information and the assessments contained in the report will help focus our deliberations and assist us in developing action plans for the future.

The *Social Health of Nevada* report is the first of its kind in our state. This forward-thinking report will allow those in elected offices to better prioritize and budget in areas such as health and human services, education and the environment.

When I became governor in 1999, one of my goals was to make dramatic changes to how the state of Nevada addressed various health issues. This was not an election issue for me, but something I had been working on much of my forty years in Nevada to improve. Throughout my life, social issues have always been a priority . . . perhaps due to my personal situation growing up as the child of working poor parents who struggled to make ends meet.

When I came into office, it was not uncommon for Nevada to be on the bottom of every list you would wish to be on the top of, and at the top of every list you'd want to be near the bottom of. But Nevada is now moving in the right direction. Although we have not met all of our goals and still face many challenges, changes have

taken place over the last seven years that, if kept intact, will continue to improve Nevada's national ranking in these significant social and health areas.

In many of the categories you will examine and discuss today – teen pregnancy, dropout and graduation rates, prenatal care and infant mortality, mental health, problem gambling, and homelessness, to name a few – Nevada has dramatically improved its response.

But what about the other important issues such as the First Amendment and the limits of the law . . . law, ethics and negative political campaigning . . . mass media and uncivil wars in politics . . . and uses and misuses of civility in public discourse?

As governor, I have had the opportunity to address many of these issues, and to bring greater attention to them by legislators and others interested in making Nevada a better place for all those who call the Silver State home.

I am personally proud of the accomplishments we have made in successfully improving the quality of life for many Nevadans during my terms in office . . . but I am far from satisfied.

There is much work to be done. Forums and discussions such as this can only help to focus more attention on the critical social health needs of our state.

Today you will learn much about the health of Nevada, and you will discuss ways to improve our current condition.

I would encourage you to develop plans educating the constitutional and other elected officials of this state that will take office in 2007. How will you challenge those leaders to continue the fight to address and provide for the health of our state? And, as I stated earlier, how will you get the private sector to become engaged in your efforts?

These are some of the challenges you face. I applaud your dedication and your spirit of cooperation in making a difference in the lives of so many.

As governor and soon to be ordinary citizen, I sincerely hope you are successful in your ventures. I have not discussed a number of the important social health programs we have initiated over the past seven years, but I will be more than happy to respond to any of your questions regarding the important changes we have made to the social health and well-being of Nevada.

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\*This report stems from the Justice & Democracy forum on the Leading Social Indicators in Nevada that took place on November 5, 2004, at the William S. Boyd School of Law. The report, the first of its kind for the Silver State, has been a collaborative effort of the University of Nevada faculty, Clark County professionals, and state of Nevada officials. The Social Health of Nevada report was made possible in part by a Planning Initiative Award that the Center for Democratic Culture received from the UNLV President's office for its project "Civic Culture Initiative for the City of Las Vegas." Individual chapters are brought on line as they become available. For further inquiries, please contact authors responsible for individual reports or email CDC Director, Dr. Dmitri Shalin [shalin@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:shalin@unlv.nevada.edu).