

Gilman saved the ranch from bankruptcy in the early 2000s, after founder and original owner Joe Conforte was arrested for tax fraud and forfeited the property to the federal government in 1999. Gilman bought the original buildings and moved them to a site he already owned. The older of the two buildings now houses a bar, private quarters for the residents and several different “party rooms.” And the newest building contains a bar and restaurant that are licensed independently of the brothel, more rooms and the gift shop.

Gilman believes brothels are an easy target for anti-trafficking campaigns, but the real threats come from unlicensed establishments where the connection to the sex trade is already implied.

“I think because we’re the most visible, and the rest of the industry is behind the curtains,” Gilman said. “For example, it’s rampant in the massage industry, but there’s no oversight. There’s no work cards. ... And the other thing that happens is so much of the trafficking takes place, like, for example, in Las Vegas and the hotels. The criminal element has found a way to make an incredible amount of off-tax money by operating at something that’s so much in demand.”

Gilman said that both legalization of sex work at large and banning it

completely would have the same result: pushing women into the hands of predators. Plus, he said, Nevada already knows how to regulate industries that are typically thought of as vices.

“I am in favor of it, just like gaming,” Gilman said. “It should happen within four walls, with strong oversight and administration by the government, so that the right people get involved and the right controls are involved. ... Nobody’s going to be hurt on our watch, if you know what I mean. That doesn’t happen in the outside world. They’re vulnerable.”

However, Guinasso disagrees.

“I think it would be catastrophic if those industries were regulated with the same lackadaisical and indifferent oversight that the brothel industry is regulated with,” he said. “The idea that they have to do a full-on FBI background check is a misnomer. The sheriff’s departments aren’t putting that much time and energy into it. They’re doing the basic background check and then giving the card. But as you see from the brothel cards I have, there’s a lot of stuff that’s just not followed through on.”

At the end of the night, Gilman stood up to thank those in attendance and to announce the creation of the Mustang Foundation, a non-profit that he said is

dedicated to helping victims of trafficking. He later admitted that the foundation was still in the planning stages as far as its direct purpose, but that he’d like to see the money used locally in a method similar to groups like Operation Underground Railroad.

“They’ve had a couple of functions here and I’ve put a ton of money in there,” he said. “They set up stings in China, in Taiwan, in Australia. ... They have their lives at stake infiltrating these goddamn groups so they could do something with them. And it’s too prevalent in our own community in the areas that I just told you. We need to watch and manage those areas where things happen behind the door with no visibility and no licensing and no health checks.” □



Some of the items sold in the Mustang Ranch's gift shop.

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