

STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR HARRY REID

**Senate Commerce Committee
State of Professional Boxing Hearing
February 5, 2003**

Senator Reid: Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to testify at today's Full Committee hearing on the state of professional boxing. I am pleased that we are holding a hearing on the state of this wonderful sport. While it is a sport blessed with myth and legend dating back to the days of ancient Rome, professional boxing is beset with wide-ranging problems that are beyond the scope of the current system of state regulation.

I have a great deal of interest in the sport of boxing. My home state, Nevada, hosts many of the premier boxing matches in the world. Nevada's state-of-the-art resorts provide a venue for the fights that is unmatched in any other part of the world, and Nevadans take great pride in the historical role the state has played in boxing. The Nevada State Athletic Commission (NSAC) is probably the most respected boxing commission in the world. The NSAC works hard to protect the integrity of the sport even when it costs the state millions of dollars in revenue such as when the commission rejected Mike Tyson's application for a boxing license after he had bitten Lennox Lewis.

Personally, I have an interest in the sport because I am a former boxer. I have served as a ringside judge in hundreds of fights, in all weight classes, and have even judged championship fights. As a lawyer in private practice, I represented a number of boxers. These experiences have given me a unique perspective on the sport.

I understand that today's hearing will focus on the problems facing professional boxing, the success of federal regulations in solving those problems, and legislative proposals to improve the professional boxing industry which include the creation of a federal regulatory entity to oversee the sport.

The rules governing professional boxing and the enforcement of those rules vary widely among states. Organized regulatory athletic commissions and associations such as the N.B.A., N.F.L. and P.G.A. play an integral role in almost every sport except boxing.

Since professional boxing is not successfully regulated by a private entity and there is no prospect for meaningful self-regulation, I am hopeful that the legislation that I previously introduced with Senator McCain, the National Boxing Commission Act of 2001, is a step in the right direction in creating a central regulatory entity that can closely monitor the activities and controversies of this sport.

The National Boxing Commission would prescribe and enforce uniform regulations for professional boxing in order to protect the health and safety of boxers and to ensure fairness in the sport. Among other things, the Commission would maintain a national computerized registry for the collection of specific information on professional boxers and boxing personnel, certify for each boxing match the participating boxer's medical history, and review plans submitted by all

state athletic commissions for uniformity.

Unfortunately, since the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act was signed into law, the problems plaguing the sport of boxing have not abated. Arguably, in some respects, they have increased as demonstrated by Mike Tyson's behavior in biting Lennox Lewis, and the subsequent sideshow press conferences. I remain convinced that we need a federally recognized panel to oversee this sport and provide it with the much-needed uniformity of regulations in governing fights. Without such uniformity, we will continue to see the forum shopping that we witnessed with Mike Tyson. While the Nevada Commission truly cares about the sport, different states have different rules and objectives, and many of the existing laws are insufficient and rarely enforced.

Additionally, the business of boxing is growing with the expansion of technology, and we need to level the playing field in the treatment of promoters. Many broadcasters have become de facto promoters, and as a matter of fairness, they ought to be held to the same standards of accountability and scrutiny as the de jure promoters.

I am proud of the work that Senator McCain and I have done to reform this great sport and look forward to continuing these efforts.