



Senate of the Associated Students of the University of Nevada

90th Session, 2022-2023

A RESOLUTION TO DIVEST FROM PRISON LABOR

Resolution Number: 54

Authored By: Senator Jojan on behalf of Senate Secretary Layland, Legislative Clerk Habon, Senior Secretary Chavez, Secretary Drew, Secretary Wortinger, and Director Wolfgang

Sponsored By: 2022-2023 Student Government Assembly

Whereas, according to Title IX, Chapter 901, Section 13 of the Statutes of the Associated Students, the Office of the Secretary of the Senate, in conjunction with the Archives of the Associated Students, is tasked with preparing “a Book of minutes for each body” at the end of each semester; and

Whereas, these Books include agendas, minutes, and any supporting or miscellaneous material for meetings held by the Senate and its committees for the preceding semester; and

Whereas, books containing the minutes of the Senate and its committees serve a crucial purpose in preserving the documented history of the Associated Students for future generations; and

Whereas, Silver State Industries (SSI) is a private, for-profit enterprise operating under the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC); and

Whereas, according to their website, SSI exclusively utilizes inmate labor for its operations, manufacturing products such as furniture, mattresses, and garments while also providing services such as automobile vehicle restoration and printing¹; and

Whereas, issues surrounding prison labor have been well documented with the conditions of incarcerated workers as many U.S. prisons “violate the most fundamental human rights to life and dignity,” said

¹ Silver State Industries. (August 16, 2017). “Welcome to Silver State Industries”. Accessible at <https://ssi.nv.gov/>

Clinical Prof. Claudia Flores, the director of the Global Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago²; and

Whereas, a report from the ACLU and University of Chicago finds that 64% of incarcerated workers surveyed report worrying about their safety while working, 70% percent say they received no formal job training, and 70% percent report not being able to afford basic necessities like soap and phone calls with prison labor wages³; and

Whereas, the report further details that 76% of incarcerated people surveyed report facing punishment—such as solitary confinement, denial of sentence reductions, or loss of family visitation—if they decline to worked⁴; and also

Whereas, as a result of these statistics, ACLU and the University of Chicago conclude that prison labor amounts to forced labor and offers nothing beyond coercion and exploitation, coining the practice as “modern-day slavery”; and

Whereas, which employs approximately 655 inmates as of June 2022, has received extensive criticism from lawmakers, criminal justice reform advocates, and members of the community for its exploitative practices, which have left countless outgoing inmates penniless, at-risk, and lacking the “transformative” skills promised to them by the company⁵; and

Whereas, SSI’s practices mirror the illegal post-Civil War model of “convict leasing,” which consists of offering the labor of incarcerated individuals to private or public entities and generating revenue for the incarcerating party as a result; and

² University of Chicago Law School. (June 15, 2022). “U.S. prison labor programs violate fundamental human rights, new report finds”. Accessible at <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/us-prison-labor-programs-violate-fundamental-human-rights-new-report-finds>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Foreman, N. (May 24, 2022). “Inmate labor may alleviate Nevada housing shortage, but critics question low wages”. *The Nevada Independent*. Accessible at <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/inmate-labor-may-alleviate-nevada-housing-shortage-but-critics-question-low-wages>

Whereas, according to data presented to the Nevada Legislature in March 2021, SSI provides a wage far below Federal and State guidelines, at most \$5.00 per hour and in some instances as low as \$0.35 per hour⁶; and

Whereas, according to a March 11, 2021 report in the Nevada Independent, many former inmates fell within the lowest wage brackets set by SSI, with some earning no more than \$1.00 per day during their incarceration⁷; and

Whereas, by paying inmates a fraction of minimum wage and withholding benefits or services beyond that already furnished by the inmate's correctional facility, SSI has reported revenues upwards of \$47 million while also reporting no more than \$500,000 in wages dispersed to inmates⁸; and

Whereas, as a result, SRI has entertained proposals to supply inmate labor for services such as affordable housing construction, further solidifying the company's desire to expand upon its legally questionable convict leasing practices⁹; and

Whereas, former inmate Jovan Jackson, delivering public comment during a Nevada State Senate Committee on Judiciary meeting on March 10, 2021, testified that inmates—including himself—often operated heavy machinery, were placed in physical danger, and worked tirelessly every day “for Top Ramen Noodles and a bar of soap,” only for them to struggle obtaining employment once released from prison¹⁰; and

⁶ Neal, D. (March 10, 2021). “Silver State Industries Wage Information “ Nevada State Legislature. Accessible at: https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/81st2021/ExhibitDocument/OpenExhibitDocument?exhibitId=48386&fileDownloadName=SB140_Silver%20State%20Industries%20Wage%20Information_Senator%20Dina%20Neal.pdf.

⁷ Golonka, S. (March 11, 2021). “Wide range of supporters push for minimum wage for Nevada prisoners”. *The Nevada Independent*. Accessible at <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/wide-range-of-supporters-push-for-minimum-wage-for-nevada-prisoners>

⁸ Nevada State Senate Committee on Judiciary Meeting (March 10, 2021). Accessible at <https://sg001-harmony.sliq.net/00324/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20210310/-1/?fk=7305&viewmode=1>

⁹ Foreman, N. (2022)

¹⁰ Nevada State Senate Committee on Judiciary (2021).

Whereas, Bill Quenga, Deputy Director of Industrial Programs, has publicly dismissed increasing wages for “offenders” or reforming SSI’s practices to provide the “same opportunit[ies] as a free person,” labeling any improvements for workers “not fair” to Nevada taxpayers¹¹; and

Whereas, SSI has violated the public trust while openly and systematically reinforcing the legacy of convict leasing in the United States, facing little to no legislative resistance throughout its 44-year history; and

Whereas, between 1991 to 2018, the Senate Secretary for the Associated Students of the University of Nevada enlisted SSI’s services for the printing of Books of minutes; and

Whereas, S.B. 86-03 – An Act to Move Monies within the ASUN Senate Account for Senate Session Books, which was passed unanimously by the Senate during the June 13th, 2018 meeting, directly endorsed the Secretary of the Senate to contract SSI labor for the printing of Books¹²; and

Whereas, though no Books of minutes have been printed since 2018, the Office of the Secretary has not sought out an alternative vendor for the printing of Books, nor has the Office formally notified SSI that they intend to sever their relationship with the company; and

Whereas, in the interest of the student body and the University community, and in the pursuit of civic responsibility and responsible leadership, the Association has an obligation to oppose the exploitation of inmates and the capitalization of cheap prison labor; now, therefore,

Be it resolved that, this body strongly opposes the contracting of SSI or any vendor which primarily utilizes prison labor for the printing of Books by the Office of the Secretary; and

Be it further resolved that, this body urges the Office of the Secretary, as well as other Departments and Offices at the University of Reno, Nevada, to seek an alternative vendor for any such services in the future; and

¹¹ Foreman, N. (2022)

¹² S.B. 86-03 – An Act to Move Monies within the ASUN Senate Account for Senate Session Books. Accessible at <https://nevada.app.box.com/file/520822551946>

Be it further resolved that, this Body encourages where required in the Governing Documents investment in local and small business in the Nevada community for the contracting of services, including the binding of books and more; and

Be it further resolved that, a copy of this Resolution be sent to the following individuals:

- a) Sandra Rodriguez, Director of ASUN;
- b) Wyatt Layland, Secretary of the Senate;
- c) Dionne Stanfill, President of ASUN;
- d) Vic Redding, UNR Vice President for Administration & Finance
- e) Michael Flores, UNR Vice President of Government Relations and Community Engagement

Adopted in Senate on October 19th, 2022

Attest:

Wyatt Layland, Senate Secretary

Andrew Thompson, Speaker of the Senate