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## Mining law reform must be reasonable

By John Ensign, • Harry Reid • and Dean Heller

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Nevada taxpayers currently are facing uncertain economic conditions. Housing prices are dropping while family budgets are being strained by food, gas and health-care costs. This poses a difficult scenario for many working families.

That is why Congress must ensure that any mining law reform that passes is reasonable and measured. Nevada is a world leader in mining, and mining is the largest industry in rural Nevada. Unfortunately, the House of Representatives passed a mining law reform bill last year that is not balanced and is not something Nevada can accept.

While the mining industry agrees that some royalties should be paid on minerals that are taken from public lands, the House proposal went too far. It would impose an 8-percent royalty on new mining operations, one of the highest royalties in the world, and a 4-percent royalty on existing operations.

Fortunately, there still is time, which means there is still hope. All sides of this debate -- including the mining industry, the support industries (such as suppliers and mechanics), hunters and anglers and constituents from mining-dependent states like Nevada -- are hard at work to develop a much-needed, fair and comprehensive mining law reform bill. All parties are striving for a mining policy that rewards environmental stewardship, provides certainty to our mining communities and allows for a reasonable return to the American taxpayer for the use of our public lands.

Congress should pass reasonable mining law reform, and by working together we can achieve this goal. Nevada is the heart of American mining, and we will make sure that it remains so.

U.S. Sens. John Ensign and Harry Reid represent Nevada in the U.S. Senate. U.S. Rep. Dean Heller represents Nevada District 2 in the U.S. House of Representatives.