

Press Release of Senator Reid REID CALLS FOR FEDERAL TASK FORCE TO INVESTIGATE CHILD ABUSE AND POLYGAMY Letter to Attorney General Urges Support For Local Prosecutions

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Harry Reid of Nevada sent a letter today to U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales suggesting the creation of a federal task force to investigate the interstate activity of the polygamist community in the western United States. In addition, Reid asked the Justice Department to provide any necessary assistance to state prosecutors in the case of polygamist sect leader Warren Steed Jeffs. The so-called “Fundamentalist” group of polygamists is accused of systematic child abuse, and the majority of members live in the border region of Utah , Arizona , and Nevada . “For too long, this outrageous activity has been disguised in the mask of religious freedom,” Reid wrote in the letter. “But child abuse and human servitude have nothing to do with religious freedom and must not be tolerated. Individuals who force minors into adult relationships and marriage must be brought to justice.” The full text of the letter is below. ### September 12, 2006 The Honorable Alberto Gonzales Attorney General U.S. Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20530-0001 Dear Judge Gonzales: I write to urge that the Department of Justice provide all necessary assistance to state prosecutors in the case of polygamist sect leader Warren Steed Jeffs. More generally, the federal government should work with state officials to address the broader pattern of serious criminal conduct by all those who use multiple marriages to abuse women and children. As you know, Jeffs was recently apprehended by Nevada state troopers and has been extradited to Utah , where he faces rape accomplice charges for arranging the marriage of a teenage girl to an older man in Nevada . Jeffs is also under indictment in Arizona for sexual assault on a minor and conspiracy to commit sexual conduct with a minor. The charges in both states involve an ongoing course of conduct in which Jeffs arranged marriages between teenage girls and older, married men. Jeffs himself is said to have at least 40 wives and dozens of children. I respectfully suggest that DOJ monitor these state prosecutions and consider federal charges if, for some reason, Jeffs is acquitted in both Utah and Arizona . I was pleased to learn that the U.S. Attorney in Arizona has charged Jeffs with the federal crime of fleeing prosecution and will seek to keep Jeffs in custody even if he were to satisfy bail conditions on the state charges. In addition, I suggest that you consider the establishment of a federal task force to investigate the interstate activity of the larger polygamist community in the western United States . There is a substantial federal interest in preventing the systematic child abuse involved in this modern day polygamy movement. The so-called “Fundamentalist” sect of which Jeffs is a leader broke away from the Mormon Church more than a century ago and has been fully disavowed by the leadership and mainstream membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The group is reported to have thousands of members, the majority of whom live in the border region of Utah , Arizona , and my state of Nevada . Forced marriages between teenage girls and older men are prevalent in the isolated communities in which these individuals reside, and interstate travel is frequent. For too long, this outrageous activity has been masked in the guise of religious freedom. But child abuse and human servitude have nothing to do with religious freedom and must not be tolerated. Individuals who force minors into adult relationships and marriage must be brought to justice. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely, HARRY REID United States Senator