

WEST VALLEY RESORT AND CASINO

By Bob Barrett

There was a lot of publicity when I went to Washington, D.C. and testified before a Congressional subcommittee in support of the proposed West Valley Resort and Casino proposed by the Tohono O'odham Nation. Since then a lot of folks have asked me why I support the casino and ask about the status of it.

It was about two years ago when I was asked to come in early to a Regional Council meeting of the Maricopa Association of Governments, or MAG. I did and met with representatives of the Tohono and they told me about the proposed resort and casino. It is estimated to create 6,000 construction jobs and 3,000 permanent jobs. I told them at that time and I continue to say yes, I support the proposal.

Glendale has objected to it and has claimed that some time in the future the property would develop in that city and produce 5,000 permanent jobs, etc. My objection to that is that Glendale is talking about "someday" jobs but the Tohono would create immediate jobs. If they had the green light they'd start construction immediately. I know of friends who are facing foreclosure, who cannot afford to purchase the school supplies they're supposed to buy for their kids and are struggling just to feed their families because there is no work available. The influx of jobs into the West Valley would help all the cities. Those who got the construction jobs would be spending money in the area. Those who got the permanent jobs also would be spending money locally.

Some critics have said the Tohono would not hire local folks to work at the resort and casino. No doubt some of the key management jobs would be held by tribal members, but the Tohono's nearest reservation is near Gila Bend and they are not going to commute that far each day for the regular jobs. Critics have said it will not supply a lot of high paying jobs; most will be at minimum wage or just above. That could be true...but why did those critics not speak up when Kohl's announced it was hiring folks and the line to apply wrapped around Jobing.Com arena? I'm sure those were not all executive positions. They also were silent when McDonald's announced it was hiring and had a similar turnout of job seekers. If you have no work at all, minimum wage sounds very good.

Many Glendale officials claim the proposed casino is in their city, or the heart of the city. As I said in Congress during my testimony: If the site is in the heart of Glendale, Glendale must wear its heart on its sleeve. The site is a county island at about 95th Avenue and Northern. Glendale has a boundary on three sides of the county island; Peoria is on the fourth side. Northern Avenue is our southern boundary with Glendale.

Finally, one other question that comes up is if the casino is allowed there, the next one might be in downtown Peoria or downtown Glendale. Not possible. The law clearly states that if the Tohono wants to take the land into reservation status, which allows a casino, then the land must be in the county.

No one knows how long this dispute will last. Currently, the question of whether or not a casino would be allowed is before the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

I'll keep you updated as the issue evolves.