

Arizona Republic

Tohono O'odham defend W. Valley casino plans

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Ned Norris Jr. is chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation.

Norris was the guest last week on Live Talk Wednesday. Here are excerpts from the interview, which can be found in its entirety at aztalk.azcentral.com. The Tohono O'odham stunned Glendale officials and opponents of casino gambling when it announced in January its plans for the \$600 million West Valley resort and casino on 134 acres owned by the tribe at 91st and Northern avenues.

1. Chairman Norris, could you give us a brief overview of your plans for a casino in Glendale?

The amenities will complement surrounding entertainment venues and enhance the already established entertainment district. The resort-casino will include a gaming area, hotel rooms, a full-service spa, and a three-acre atrium that will include retail space, restaurants and a botanical garden. It will also have a convention and entertainment center equipped with the latest technology.

2. What would be the casino's economic impact on the West Valley and the state?

Results from comprehensive economic-impact and feasibility studies confirm that the new facility will cost at least \$500 million and create more than 6,000 construction jobs. Once completed, facility operations will create over 3,000 new jobs in the community and the annual impacts will exceed \$300 million.

3. What has been the reaction to your plans from the community? Other tribes?

As expected, concerns have been raised by some and we are committed to working to address these needs as we move forward. Meetings with interested parties will continue so we can build enduring, productive relations in the community.

4. How confident are you that the land proposed for the casino at 91st and Northern avenues will be designated by the feds as reservation land?

The United States has promised to hold these lands in trust for the Nation as reservation lands "for all purposes." We believe the United States will keep the promises it made in the act and will add the land at 91st and Northern avenues to the Nation's reservation.

5. What is your response to those who are concerned that the casino could impact the state gaming compact?

Some opponents of the Nation's West Valley Resort falsely claim that it might trigger the "poison-pill" provisions in the gaming compacts, which could greatly expand the gaming permitted in Arizona. This poison pill is triggered only if Arizona law changes to permit those other than Indian tribes to operate certain forms of gaming authorized under the compact.