

# Arizona Republic

## Tolleson backs tribe's plan for Glendale casino

by **Carrie Watters** - Feb. 20, 2010 08:00 AM  
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The Tolleson City Council this week unanimously passed a resolution in support of a controversial tribal resort and casino proposed near Glendale's sports and entertainment district.

Adolfo Gámez, mayor of Tolleson, which is less than 10 miles south of the proposed development by the Tohono O'odham Nation, said the council support is about bringing jobs to the West Valley.

Peoria's mayor has expressed similar support, although the matter has not formally gone before the council there.

Glendale leaders oppose the creation of a reservation in their planning area.

Gámez said tribal leaders and opponents should negotiate. At stake, he said, are 6,000 construction jobs and 3,000 permanent jobs the project would directly and indirectly create.

"I can't see the logic of not bringing jobs to the West Valley," Gámez said. "Some of those jobs would go to people in my community. Maybe that's too practical."

The vote comes as the tribe sent mailers in Glendale and Peoria touting the project's economic benefits. Some criticized the fliers' failure to mention that a casino would be part of the "West Valley Resort."

Glendale Mayor Elaine Scruggs said the mailers and renderings were "attractive, expensive and totally irrelevant to the subject of an Indian reservation being created inside the boundaries of the city of Glendale . . . a sovereign nation that is exempt from all laws, regulations and other matters governing life for everyone else in the community."

Scruggs said, "Economics is not the primary factor in assessing the impact of creating an Indian reservation with a gaming operation in the middle of a community. The social impact of such an action is significant, negative and permanent."

The Tolleson council also passed a resolution to oppose a proposed state law, supported by Glendale, that would allow the city to annex the 135 acres owned by the Tohono O'odham, effectively derailing the tribe's plans.

"We feel that the legislation . . . goes against what we need in the West Valley - jobs," Gámez said.

Rep. Jerry Weiers, R-Glendale, and Sen. John Nelson, R-Litchfield Park, this month introduced identical bills in each chamber that would allow cities to annex property without the landowner's consent if the landowner had asked the federal government to take the land into trust, designating it as a reservation.

The bills say the property would have to be bordered by the city on at least three sides, as is the case with the Tohono O'odham property, which lies between Northern and Glendale avenues and 91st and 95th avenues, bordering Glendale on three sides and Peoria on the fourth.

The tribe applied to the U.S. Department of Interior more than a year ago to have the land taken into trust as a result of a settlement to replace reservation land near Gila Bend that was damaged by a federal dam. The settlement has certain parameters, which includes a requirement that the land be in an unincorporated area.

The federal government is typically slow to decide such requests. Meanwhile, the political and legal battles rage.