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West Valley Resort Offers Unprecedented Economic Opportunity

by **Ned Norris Jr, Chairman, Tohono O'odham Nation** - Nov. 25, 2010 09:28 PM

Opponents of the Tohono O'odham Nation's West Valley Resort project have been playing a cynical game. Legal maneuvers by Glendale and Gila River officials against the project have blared from the headlines in recent weeks.

These opponents are hoping their flurry of accusations will create confusion and make everyone forget that this project will be a shining star for the West Valley. In fact, they would rather just ignore all of the positive effects and support surrounding this project. This includes:

- The 6,000 construction jobs and 3,000 permanent jobs that will be created.
- That it will be constructed and run at no cost to taxpayers, unlike virtually every major economic development project in the Valley.
- That it will generate \$300 million in annual economic activity that will stay right here in Arizona.
- That construction alone will generate more than \$100 million in tax revenue for state and local governments.
- And 70 percent of West Valley voters have consistently said they support this.

To gloss over these undeniable truths, opponents continue to file nuisance lawsuits and release scurrilous press quotes to try to manufacture doubt. Amazingly, they have now stooped to recruiting and paying for other interests to file additional lawsuits in a desperate attempt to validate their misguided arguments.

Many of the claims in these suits have already received close examination and have been ruled on. Working together, Glendale and Gila River's lawyers have put forth a barrage of unprecedented attacks and arguments over the past 18 months, each of which was closely reviewed by the Department of the Interior.

In every case the Interior Department ruled in favor of the Tohono O'odham Nation, in a manner that is consistent with and respectful of both federal and state law. Despite this, Glendale and Gila River are continuing with the same attacks in court and, in the end, will see the same results.

These haphazard charges and self-serving tactics reek of desperation. At every turn, Glendale and Gila River have run up against the federal law passed by Congress and signed by President Ronald Reagan that allows the Nation to take land into trust as a replacement for lands lost due to flooding from the Painted Rock Dam.

It is this unique circumstance that has given the Nation the opportunity to move forward with plans to build a first-class resort and casino in the West Valley.

The Nation has followed the appropriate process in accordance with federal and state law. Despite the delaying tactics of opponents, the Department of the Interior has repeatedly decided in favor of the nation and approved our land-into-trust application.

Because they cannot win on the merits, opponents resort instead to lies, distortions and delays.

It's evident that opponents know that the law is on the nation's side by the fact that they have their high-paid lobbyists working overtime to change the law at the federal and state levels. They know they cannot win in court, so they are trying to draw out the process while their lobbyists rewrite the law in their favor.

Glendale officials are acting in the face of public support for the project, while Gila River officials are narrowly focused on the potential impacts to their own market share. Neither is acting in the interests of the community.

Despite opponents' self-serving misinformation campaign, the Tohono O'odham Nation will continue to work with local governmental and community entities to make sure this project succeeds. We are committed to being good neighbors and to bringing 10,000 jobs to the region.

As project opponents conduct their scorched earth attacks, they need to answer why they are so opposed to a project that requires no public subsidy or debt, and which would provide high-quality jobs to our citizens. This project is too important for the Tohono O'odham, for the West Valley and for Arizona.

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