

Glendale City Council sending mixed messages about casino

Written by Administrator

Friday, 22 November 2013 02:06 -

Three Glendale City Council members recently sent a letter to federal officials that denounces the city's opposition to a proposed casino near its sports and entertainment district.

Specifically, the three councilmen criticized a letter that City Attorney Michael Bailey sent the U.S. Department of Interior in September to affirm the Glendale's long-held opposition to the Tohono O'odham Nation's casino plans.

The Nov. 15 letter to the Interior signed by Councilmen Ian Hugh, Gary Sherwood and Sam Chavira slams Bailey's memo as "nothing more than a regurgitation of arguments" that have largely been dismissed by the courts. Opponents, primarily two tribes with Valley casinos, "continue to act with reckless abandon in their blind attempts to maintain market share," the letter says.

A council rift is deepening over whether to continue fighting the five-year legal battle that so far has cost the city about \$3.5 million.

As the three councilmen were denouncing the city's opposition, another flew to Washington, D.C., to lobby against the Tohono O'odham and the mayor sent letters to Glendale residents outlining the harm he believes a casino would cause.

Mayor Jerry Weiers' mailers were paid for by Keeping the Promise, a group that includes the Gila River Indian Community. Weiers said on Nov. 21 that he didn't have time to discuss the letters.

The Gila River tribe also paid for Councilman Manny Martinez's trip last week to meet with Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., the chair of the Committee on Indian Affairs, and U.S. Senate staff.

The Gila River tribe has fought the Tohono O'odham in the courts and in Congress.

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The mixed signals have emanated from City Hall since October, when a majority of council members directed staff to open dialogue with tribal leaders for the first time in years to assess the impact a casino at 95th and Northern avenues could have on city resources.

Martinez said he wanted to send a clear signal: He remains opposed to the casino. Martinez said he, along with the vice mayor of Scottsdale and the Gilbert mayor, told Senate staffers that the casino would create a burden on area taxpayers. He cited a study authored years ago by Elliot D. Pollack & Company that found that a casino would require the city to build a new fire station and beef up police.

Tohono O'odham leaders have said they would cover their own public-safety expenses, which the Pollack study does not take into account.

Hugh said the study is inaccurate.

The Tohono O'odham Nation announced plans to build a West Valley casino in 2009. The southern Arizona-based tribe aims to have the land designated as a reservation as part of a federal settlement to replace tribal land damaged by a federally built dam.

Since declaring opposition shortly after the plan's announcement, Glendale has lost two lawsuits and backed unsuccessful federal legislation that would have hampered the tribe's plans. U.S. Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., sponsored a similar bill this year.

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