



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Law and Order Committee votes down the Grand Canyon Escalade Project**

**LEUPP, Ariz.** – On Monday, the Law and Order Committee considered Legislation No. 0293-16, which seeks to approve the master agreement for the development of the Grand Canyon Escalade Project and approve the funding application in the amount of \$65 million for the development of the offsite infrastructure for the project.

It would also authorize the Navajo Nation Hospitality Enterprise to enter into a development and operating agreement, approve covenant not to compete, waive certain provisions of Title 7 Section 1101 and 1118 of the Navajo Nation Code, and accept the approval of the land withdrawal in the Bodaway/Gap Chapter.

“This project will allow the Nation to take part in the tourism market. The proposed project will create jobs and economic opportunities. Our Nation is facing shrinking revenues from coal, oil, and gas and this project will assist those decreasing deficits,” stated Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill), who sponsored the legislation.

Delegate Bennett added that the 66,000 opposing comments submitted for the legislation is most likely from non-Navajos, who don’t know the daily situations on the Navajo Nation. This proposed project is for our children and for our Nation’s future.

According to the Grand Canyon Escalade briefing book prepared by the Confluence Partners L.L.C., the Grand Canyon Escalade would be a tourism destination featuring a gondola tramway to the floor of the Grand Canyon. The Escalade is located on the western edge of the Navajo Nation at the Confluence of the Colorado River and Little Colorado River located 100 miles north of Flagstaff, Arizona.

Confluence Partners L.L.C. agent Arizona Rep. Albert Hale (D-2) stated that the Escalade project would provide employment, sustainable renewable revenue, diversified economic base, infrastructure improvements, cultural preservation, clean industry, and great business opportunities for the Nation.

Rep. Hale added that the proposed project will have a Navajoland Discovery Center, Tramway, riverwalk, specialty retail stores, restaurants, artist in residence studios, vendor markets, tourism information center, rim trails, entertainment lawn, public safety office, hotels, gas station, RV

park and provide water lines, roads, electric services, sewer treatment plant, and communications for the area.

LOC member Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) questioned if the community of Bodaway/Gap, surrounding communities, and Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development supported the proposed Escalade project.

“As I look through the legislation, I see supporting documents from the chapter and others from two to five years ago. Are there any recent supportive documents for the project? This is not included in the Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development’s priority listing as well. In 2012, the chapter approved a resolution with a 59 to 52 vote to support the Escalade project and land withdrawal. That is a close vote among the chapter members. Has there been a public hearing regarding this initiative? The Navajo people need to be engaged with this proposal because this is a request for the people’s money,” said Delgate Begay.

According to Rep. Hale, the Nation would retain ownership in all the land and improvements, and Confluence Partners L.L.C. will develop and operate the project under development and operating agreements with the Navajo Nation Hospitality Enterprise. The Confluence Partners L.L.C. will contribute \$162 million to develop and construct the phase one improvements and the Nation could contribute up to \$63 million to develop and construct all roads and utilities to the proposed site, he added.

LOC member Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. (Shonto, Naa’tsis’Áán, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin) asked where the \$65 million would come from, and if the project could cause harm to cultural and sacred sites.

Rep. Hale said the Escalade’s planning, approvals, design, and construction would be fully compliant with the Navajo Nation Cultural Protection Act and there are no known sacred sites within Escalade’s boundaries.

“I have many issues with this project. First, the \$65 million can be used for different priorities within the Nation. The Nation can find alternatives to gain revenues. Over 66,000 opposing comments are included in the legislation. Personally, I oppose this project because it’s located within sacred ceremonial grounds. The location is home to Navajo deities and the backbone and foundation to all Navajo ceremonies. We need to protect our sacred grounds,” stated LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi).

The Confluence Partners L.L.C plans to have the master agreement approved in November 2017 if the Navajo Nation Council approves the bill and the Escalade project construction could begin in Aug. 2018 and open in May 2020, said Rep. Hale.

“This proposed project is a gamble for the Nation and it does not reflect Navajo principles and values. We face the same scared site issues in New Mexico, such as Fort Wingate. We can not allow this to open again. Pray that harmony and unity is restored in our Nation’s decision making,” stated LOC chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau).

The Law and Order Committee voted 0-4 to oppose Legislation No. 0293-16, with one approved amendment and a directive for Confluence Partners L.L.C. to provide a written report addressing the committee's concerns. The legislation moves forward to the Resources and Development Committee for consideration, and the Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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