

Statement of Kristin McMillan, CEO & President,
Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce
Las Vegas Valley Public Land and Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument Act of 2013
Thursday, October 3, 2013, 10:00 a.m.
Longworth House Office Building, Room 1324

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. It is an honor for me to speak to you today on behalf of the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce's 5,500 member businesses representing diverse sectors within the economy— 85 percent of which are small businesses – and who employ more than 230,000 employees in Southern Nevada.

Founded in the early days of Las Vegas, the Metro Chamber has a strong legacy of protecting and strengthening the Southern Nevada business community, helping its member businesses grow and thrive, and providing a voice for those employers and employees in local, state and federal government for over 100 years. Today, the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce is one of the largest metropolitan chambers of commerce in the United States.

The Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce is committed to serving and supporting the entire Las Vegas metropolitan area. Its mission is to promote a strong and diversified economy that will attract new businesses and industries, enable existing businesses to expand, and create good jobs and opportunities for all who call Southern Nevada home.

As a member-based organization focused on regional policy issues, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 2015, the Las Vegas Valley Public Land and Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument Act. I want to thank Congressman Horsford for introducing this legislation and Congressman Amodei, Congresswoman Titus and Congressman Heck for co-sponsoring this bill. I thank each of Nevada's House Members for their bi-partisan efforts to introduce this bill and to build support for this important land bill that will not only benefit Southern Nevada but the entire Southwest Region.

Land bills such as H.R. 2015 are an important component to the success of a vibrant and diversified economy to regions such as Southern Nevada. This is true for many metropolitan cities throughout the western portion of the United States. Our state currently has an unemployment rate of 9.5 percent, among the highest in the country. We at the Metro Chamber have a responsibility to our employers and their employees to support bills such as H.R. 2015 because it would give us the enabling legislation to bring needed positive change to our region. This bill represents a unique opportunity where the preservation of our past can be the economic driver of our future.

For the Metro Chamber, this bill would accomplish several objectives: preservation of our irreplaceable natural history; expansion of educational opportunities for our children and scientists; utilization of land for research, Nellis Air Force Base and outdoor recreation; and

creation of much needed jobs for our community. This bill is broadly supported by the entire State of Nevada, including the business community. The Nevada State Legislature passed a resolution in support of this designation earlier this year.

I want to highlight just a few of the many benefits:

First, this bill will preserve a significant area of natural history. The Las Vegas Valley has one of the largest collections of fossils from the Pleistocene Epoch Period, or the Ice Age, in the northern edge of our valley. Archaeologists and scientists have been exploring this area for almost a century because of the vast amounts of fossil remains in the area. To date, almost 10,000 fossils have been removed and stored in facilities in San Bernardino, California. Some experts suggest that these finds only represent one percent of the fossils that could be potentially located in the Las Vegas Upper Wash. The educational lessons that can be learned from these fossils are countless and priceless.

The preservation value, educational benefits and economic benefit that would be gained has the potential to be an economic game changer for our eco-tourism industry in Southern Nevada. For example, this bill will provide 1,211 acres for a park for off-roaders, which is part of 10,000 acres allocated for recreation. The creation of this park has the potential to be a major tourism draw for off-road enthusiasts in the Southwest. This bill also provides additional acreage to the Red Rock National Conversation Area, which is a natural treasure in Southern Nevada. Both of these provisions support economic development and preservation in their respective manner.

Second, this designation would create economic opportunity. Las Vegas is often referred to as the Entertainment Capital of the World because of its spectacular hotels, fine dining and breathtaking shows. According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, almost 40 million people visited Southern Nevada last year and tourism generates a \$45 billion economic in Southern Nevada, which in turn supports almost 400,000 jobs or about 47 percent of the local workforce. Tourism remains the driver of our economy and we are continually looking for ways to capitalize on this core industry, particularly when it comes to job creation.

Third, this bill will help economic development in our metropolitan area. While the bill will preserve some federal land, it also gives Bureau of Land Management land back to the community for developmental purposes. The City of Las Vegas would receive 660 acres and the City of North Las Vegas would receive 645 acres for commercial development purposes. These additional lands would allow for the Cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas to recruit new businesses to come to their communities and facilitate the expansion of existing businesses. This will result in new jobs for our region, additional revenue to the local tax base and the expansion of economic diversification efforts.

Fundamentally, this bill allows us to plan for our future because it would provide Clark County with 2,320 acres near Primm, Nevada for flood protection in preparation of the proposed Southern Nevada Supplemental Airport.

The Metro Chamber is also a strong advocate for higher education in Nevada and supports the provisions of the bill that would provide acreage to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), College of Southern Nevada and Great Basin College in Northern Nevada. This provision will allow UNLV to create a new regional campus to further serve the needs of our community. Currently, UNLV's main campus has 335 acres, which services more than 28,000 students and 3,100 faculty and staff. The additional parcels would allow them to expand educational opportunities for the students in our state, create new programs and recruit new faculty to our state's largest public institution of higher education.

The Metro Chamber is also a partner in supporting the men and women serving in our military and works closely with the leadership at Nellis Air Force Base. This legislation recognizes and protects the important role that Nellis Air Force Base plays in our national security interests through the provisions regarding the military over flights. Nellis Air Force Base is an important part of our community and we need to help preserve their ability to continue their military objectives. We believe this bill preserves the mission of Nellis Air Force Base, while balancing the efforts between preservation, economic development and military needs.

The bill designates a qualified electric utility corridor with a 400-foot right of way for the construction of a high-voltage transmission facility and a 100-foot right of way for the construction of a buried water conveyance pipeline. The local utilities in Southern Nevada support the preserving of the utility corridor for economic development and renewable energy components of the bill.

In addition to the support of our employers and their families, the designation of this area as a national monument has the support of local government entities such as the City of Las Vegas, City of North Las Vegas, Clark County and the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe and shows the broad support that this bill has in our community.

Many community organizations have been at the forefront of championing this designation. Long-time community leaders Thalia Dondero and Helen Mortensen have tirelessly dedicated their efforts to educate our community about this important treasure in Southern Nevada through the Las Vegas Ice Age Park Foundation. This group has actively advocated for the passage of this legislation because of the historical preservation value, the curating of the fossils and educational research opportunities associated with this site.

As we continue to rebuild our economy and tackle the many challenges ahead, now, more than ever, your support of H.R. 2015 matters a great deal to the people of Southern Nevada. If we can secure the designation of this area for a national monument, we will preserve fragile parts of our world's natural history, while providing a catalyst to create jobs, put people to work while sparking the fire for innovation and interest in the minds of students. Your interest, your vision and your commitment matter to the residents of Southern Nevada. Thank you for time and consideration, and for the honor of testifying in front of this Subcommittee. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee.