



Testimony of Supervisor D.L. Wilson
Before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on
Federal Lands
In Support of H.R. 2630
The La Paz County Land Conveyance Act
October 11, 2017

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, Congressman Gosar,
and Members of the Committee,

I am D.L. Wilson, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of La Paz County, Arizona. I appreciate the invitation to testify in support of H.R. 2630, the “La Paz County Land Conveyance Act.” We appreciate Congressman Gosar’s efforts championing this legislation, which provides for the sale of up to 8,000 acres of federal land at fair market value to La Paz County for economic development purposes. Our vision is to attract new industry, especially solar development to this strategic location to diversify our local economy, create quality jobs and increase

the tax base so our rural County can adequately meet the growing needs of our citizens.

La Paz County was established in 1983 after voters approved separating from Yuma County, making us the only County to be established after Arizona became a state in 1912. Federal, State or Tribal governments own almost 95% of the land within La Paz County, with roughly 64% managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Our economy is based primarily on agriculture, fed by precious groundwater and tourism, especially during the winter months when we welcome thousands of snowbirds that flock to the banks of the Colorado River in their RVs and trailers. The County's permanent resident population is just under 21,000. The County's top priority is to attract the economic diversification that has occurred elsewhere in Arizona. Our unemployment rate is a full percent higher than the statewide average. Our population is aging with 38% over the age of 65, a 6% increase in just six years. Nearly 27% of our residents are Latino many of whom work on our farming operations. Over 18% are Native Americans and members of the Colorado River Indian Tribes. The County needs economic diversification to provide new higher paying jobs and a tax base to enable us to provide services to our vulnerable populations.

La Paz County is 4,500 square miles of desert, with less than 6% in private ownership. Several years ago the County began to pursue a

strategic site where we might attract economic development, focusing on solar renewable energy generation. The concept is similar to the successful solar development park just outside of Boulder City, Nevada in the Eldorado valley to our north. We worked closely with the District and State officials from the Bureau of Land Management to identify the site that is identified in H.R. 2630.

Strategically located between Los Angeles and Phoenix, we believe the proposed conveyance has excellent potential. It is immediately south of Interstate 10; it is adjacent to existing and proposed electric transmission facilities, natural gas lines, and fiber optic routes. It is already relatively disturbed due to past infrastructure use. Our preliminary review shows that the property does not contain endangered species nor does it have any cultural or archeological significance. Its proximity to Interstate 10 would provide easy access to attract a workforce from within our jurisdiction. A renewable energy park development could provide solar power to both the Phoenix metro area and to southern California. The requested lands to be conveyed represent less than one-half of one percent of the Federally administered land in the County.

La Paz County believes we can develop the full site over a 20-year development plan through phased conveyances at fair market value as determined by the Department of the Interior's regulations. We actually hope to do it much faster than that! Enactment of H.R. 2630 will provide revenue to the federal treasury while enabling much needed economic

diversification in our County. The Act will help our County achieve the goal to improve the lives of our residents. Again, the Board of Supervisors wishes to thank Congressman Gosar and Senator Jeff Flake, who authored the Senate companion bill, for their leadership to promote jobs and economic development in rural areas like La Paz County. On behalf of the Board of Supervisors and the residents of La Paz County I thank you for your time today. Your support is greatly appreciated.