

Mesa politicians, leaders back Gaylord hotel

by **Gary Nelson** - Dec. 11, 2008 02:36 PM
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A who's who of Mesa political and business leaders, including several legislators, are backing a deal that would bring a world-class hotel and convention center to the city.

Before that project can be built, Mesa voters will be asked in a March 10 election to approve allowing the proposed Gaylord hotel to retain control of bed taxes to be generated there. The item will appear on the ballot as Proposition 300.

Ballot arguments to be included in an election pamphlet were due this week at the City Clerk's Office. Of the 41 that were filed, no opposition emerged.

State Rep. Kirk Adams, R-Mesa the incoming speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives, said Gaylord will spur economic development in the Gateway area.

Referring to Gaylord's business model of rotating major conventions among its major resorts year to year, Adams said, "Putting Mesa into the rotation will allow this project to book thousands of rooms years in advance, building a consistent revenue source and encouraging other amenities to follow."

Adams also said the Gaylord deal will accelerate progress at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, "allowing it to grow into a natural hub that can serve the growing Southeast Valley."

State Rep. Russell Pearce, R-Mesa, one of the Legislature's most fiscally cautious lawmakers, also backed the proposal.

"I . . . struggle with projects that include any sort of incentive package," Pearce wrote, "but in this case I see how this project actually creates more revenue instead of moving it from one place to another."

Also writing in support was state Rep. Rich Crandall, R-Mesa, who said Gaylord will bring jobs and prestige to Mesa.

Gaylord wants to build its facility on the north end of property owned by DMB Associates and still being leased for vehicle testing by General Motors Corp. east of the airport.

Geoffrey Woodward, Gaylord's vice president for development, wrote in his ballot argument that the company plans to spend at least \$700 million on the project, "creating thousands of new jobs for the local community." He said it is typical for Gaylord projects to attract other major nearby developments.

John Bradley, the DMB vice president in charge of its 5-square-mile Mesa project, said, "Our intention to build a legacy community at the Mesa Proving Grounds begins with this first critical step."

Other arguments in favor were submitted individually by each member of the Mesa City Council and Mayor Scott Smith; leaders of the city's police and fire unions; the Mesa Chamber of Commerce; unsuccessful City Council candidates Rex Griswold and Matt Tolman; state and local restaurant and tourism promotion groups; and several private individuals.