

Testimony of Commissioner Steve Sisolak

Before the

Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests

Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

On

S. 3313, the Sloan Hills Withdrawal Act

Wednesday, June 16, 2010

SD-366 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Chairman Wyden, members of the Subcommittee, my name is Commissioner Steve Sisolak and I am here representing the Board of County Commissioners for Clark County, Nevada in support of S. 3313, the Sloan Hills Withdrawal Act introduced by Senator Harry Reid and Senator John Ensign. I want to express appreciation to Senator Reid for his leadership on this important local issue and thank the other members of the Congressional delegation for introducing this bill to withdraw from location, entry, and patent under the federal mining laws, approximately 640 acres located in the Sloan Hills area of my Commission District. The Clark County Board of County Commissioners has adopted two resolutions with the first on May 19, 2009, opposing

the development of the Sloan Hills limestone/gravel mine. Almost a year later on May 18, 2010 we passed a second resolution in support of S. 3313 and H.R. 5219, which is the House version of this Bill.

Within the first few months following my election to the County Commission, I became involved with this issue and immediately started seeking to find a mechanism to stop the development of this limestone/gravel mine being proposed by California-based Service Rock Products (owned by Mitsubishi) and the Mexico-based mining company Cemex on 640 acres of federal land, that is only 2.5 miles from the edge of the large master planned Anthem Community. I soon learned that local government is quite limited in our ability to influence federal land use decisions.

Local residents are right in raising a variety of concerns, including noise and vibration issues, the possibility of aggravating health conditions such as respiratory problems, and air quality problems that would have a negative impact on the quality of life of residents in Southern Nevada. The proposed mining operation, which would involve blasting and crushing rock, would also necessitate the use of Southern

Nevada's dwindling water resources to partially dampen dust clouds that contribute to the degradation of the particulate air quality in the valley. In a community that pays people to remove their lawns to conserve water, it makes no sense to allow a commercial mining enterprise to continually spray water on the desert to control dust.

If allowed to proceed, the limestone/gravel mine would operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for an estimated 20 to 30 years. Routine mining activities would include blasting and digging with significant surface disturbance and foster a dangerous 24-hour parade of heavy dump trucks to haul away the rock products from the site, which is in close proximity to I-15.

The project was proposed nearly a decade ago, long before 40,000 homes were built in the clean family neighborhoods of Anthem. Protests began in 2007 at the first public meeting on the mines, and residents are remaining committed in their opposition to this project. I have personally participated in at least 6 neighborhood meetings and town halls and have received hundreds of emails, letters and phone calls from constituents who are outraged at living in such close proximity to heavy

machinery, explosives, and potentially toxic dust. These residents uniformly say the mine would threaten both their quality of life and the value of homes that have already lost as much as 50 percent in value due to the recession. I am vehemently opposed to the mine as are the constituents I represent who have voiced their opposition to this in many ways, including over 1,000 of these T-shirts being touted. I have ensured each of your offices has received one of these T-shirts and have extras here as a reminder of how strong local opposition is.

The Sun City Anthem, senior living community where 12,000 people live formed a five-member committee opposing the project and has collected over 6,000 signatures on a petition against the mine. The committee has also enlisted the help of the boards of directors at other communities such as the Anthem Highlands, Anthem Country Club, Inspirada and Madeira Canyon.

During the EIS process for the proposed mine, the BLM has received thousands of petition signatures and at least 1,000 individual letters opposing the mine. Originally the draft environmental study was scheduled to be completed this year, but now the target date is June

2010. Unless S. 3313 is enacted to stop the process, the draft environmental-impact study will soon be published and once public input on the document is received, the final decision approving the mine is scheduled to be made by the BLM in May of 2011, just a year from now.

Finally, I want to raise another significant concern with the project and its potential to adversely impact the Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area, which contains valuable petroglyphs believed to be thousands of years old and which is located just five miles to the south and east of the mine site. The Federal law which created this NCA requires the BLM to “conserve, protect, enhance and manage” conservation areas “for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.” S. 3313 will insure that this occurs by removing the threatened impacts from a nearby mining operation. I thank you for allowing me to testify today and strongly urge you to approve S. 3313 to stop the development of the Sloan Hills Limestone and Gravel mine. Thank you.