

Testimony of Mayor John Lee,
City of North Las Vegas, Nevada
before the
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
regarding
H.R. 2015, the Las Vegas Valley Public Land and Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument
Act of 2013

October 3, 2013

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the committee, my name is John Lee, and I am the Mayor of the City of North Las Vegas. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 2015, the Las Vegas Valley Public Land and Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument Act of 2013.

The legislation before us today enjoys the bipartisan support of the entire Nevada congressional delegation. I would like to thank Rep. Steven Horsford, my congressman and former colleague in the Nevada Legislature, for his leadership on this legislation. I would also like to thank Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Senator Dean Heller for all of their hard work in crafting what I believe to be the most significant public land legislation for Southern Nevada in over a decade.

H.R. 2015 designates over 22,000 acres of federal land in the northern part of the Las Vegas Valley as a national monument. A significant portion of this acreage lies within the City of North Las Vegas. The City has worked closely for the past several years with Clark County, the City of Las Vegas, Nellis Air Force Base, NV Energy, local conservation groups, and the

business community to develop a consensus boundary for the monument that balances our desire for resource protection with our future plans for economic development.

H.R. 2015 not only establishes a unique urban national monument, the bill creates opportunities for job creation and economic development. As policy makers, I am sure you hear these buzz words in almost every hearing; however, H.R. 2015 provides critical economic development opportunities for our City. The bill includes over 1,300 acres set aside for job creation zones to be used by the City of North Las Vegas and Las Vegas.

Additionally, the urban national monument established by H.R. 2015 will provide a tremendous benefit to the tourist dependent region. Our national parks attract over 350 million domestic and international visitors each year. We believe this new monument will appeal to a percentage of the 40 million-plus visitors Southern Nevada hosts each year, in addition to attracting new visitors to our region. Our financially struggling community could benefit from the fact that national park units typically generate at least ten dollars for nearby gateway communities for every dollar invested. North Las Vegas has struggled financially, one of our zip codes is nationally ranked as one of the top 10 for worst rates of home foreclosures, and as the new Mayor of North Las Vegas, I believe H.R. 2015 is a gigantic step in the right direction towards our regions economic recovery.

I believe the establishment of the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument will serve the dual purpose of protecting nationally significant paleontological resources and promoting economic development and tourism in North Las Vegas. North Las Vegas is a

diverse minority-majority city largely comprised of a vibrant Hispanic community, and the monument will provide a place for our school children to visit and learn first hand about our Nations and Nevada's natural history. The location of the monument on the boarder of a large Hispanic community provides one possible solution to the National Park Service's widely publicized efforts attract more minorities. The Service's commissioned reports found only 1 in 10 of its visitors are Hispanic- the nation's fastest-growing demographic group. H.R. 2015 establishes a urban national monument that can act as a gateway for attracting nontraditional visitors into our national parks.

While the national monument is clearly the focal point of H.R. 2015, there are several other provisions of this legislation as important to the future growth and development of the City of North Las Vegas. Section 4 of the bill conveys 645 acres of BLM land to the City for economic development purposes. The land is adjacent to the proposed UNLV North Campus, and the conveyance would allow the City to master plan and develop this area to provide ancillary services that support the mission of the new campus. Section 8 of the bill expands the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act disposal boundary for BLM-managed lands in North Las Vegas. The City intends to nominate these parcels for sale for industrial development at a future BLM auction. and thereby increase our local tax base by converting federal land into private ownership. We anticipate that hundreds of jobs will be created as a result of this industrial development.

North Las Vegas is the home of Nellis Air Force Base, and the City is proud to be the home of many airmen and civilians who work on the base. The City has gone to great lengths to

work with Nellis to develop joint land use plans that allow for responsible development by the City while protecting the base from encroachment that could threaten its training mission. The City supports the provisions in the bill addressing military overflights and the transfer of BLM land to the Air Force to protect the important mission of Nellis.

H.R. 2015 also creates economic opportunities by establishing the Nellis Dunes Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area for outdoor enthusiasts. The City supports Clark County's effort to establish the Nellis Dunes Area on BLM land on the northeast side of the Las Vegas Valley. Our community is in desperate need of a dedicated area for this type of recreational activity. Since the City would be responsible for providing certain utility services to this area, we are pleased that the legislation provides for a Memorandum of Understanding between the City and Clark County before any economic development may occur near the recreation area.

Mr. Chairman, like many communities, the City of North Las Vegas has had its share of challenges over the past four years. As we focus on the future, I believe the establishment of the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument will bring tremendous benefits to North Las Vegas. H.R. 2015 is a critical piece of legislation that will protect an area that is currently subject to vandalism and unauthorized off-road vehicle use. It will provide a new destination for visitors to Southern Nevada, and it will provide North Las Vegas residents with the sense of pride shared by all communities that are fortunate enough to have the National Park Service as a neighbor.

I urge your support for this important legislation, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

