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Hopi Tribal Chair thanks Navajo Law and Order Committee for its unanimous opposition to proposed Escalade development

Kykotsmovi, Ariz. - Hopi Tribal Chairman Herman G. Honanie today thanked the Navajo Law and Order Committee for its action to unanimously oppose the proposed "Grand Canyon Escalade," with a gondola tramway into the revered Grand Canyon. The Committee took the action Monday at a hearing that many Hopi leaders attended.

Last month, Chairman Honanie urged the Navajo Council not to support the 420-acre tourism proposal planned by a Scottsdale developer. The Chairman said the proposal would "irreversibly compromise the tranquility and sacredness" of areas the Hopi tribe has held sacred for at least a thousand years.

The five-member Law and Order Committee is the first of four committees that will hear the proposal before it goes to the full tribal council for a vote. Hopi tribal members attending included the Chairman, Vice Chairman Alfred Lomahquahu Jr. and Leigh Kuwanwisiwma and Terry Morgart from the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office.

"The Hopi Tribe and many other Southwestern Tribes including the Navajo Nation hold the Grand Canyon as a sacred place of reverence, respect and conservation stewardship. It is important to preserve and protect these sites from harm and wrongful exploitation," the Chairman said in the letter to the Navajo leaders.

Chairman Honanie said that the proposed development of the Grand Canyon is a violation of the Intergovernmental Compact entered into between the Navajo and Hopi tribes in 2006, which states: "The Navajo and Hopi people are and shall remain neighbors, and desire to live in harmony with mutual respect for each other for all future generations. One important aspect of such mutual respect is consideration for the religious beliefs and practices of the other."

Among other things, the Intergovernmental Compact requires each tribe to respect the privacy of persons engaging in religious practices, and to not observe or intrude upon religious activities. The compact also commits the Navajo Nation to protect Hopi religious sites and guarantee Hopi religious practitioners privacy.

The Escalade tourist attraction and resort would be located near the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers. Navajo Council Delegate Benjamin Bennett, author and sponsor, who represents the non-Western Navajo Districts Fort Defiance, Crystal and Red Lake introduced the controversial legislation requiring the Navajo Nation to pay at least \$65 million for infrastructure costs.

The divisive legislation drew at least one rebuke from Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake and Thoreau), who told Bennett, “With respect, Mr. Bennett , it takes a lot of courage for you to sponsor a legislation at a chapter that you are not from.”

Director Kuwanwisiwma, who heads the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, says that the site would disturb land where Hopi pilgrimages have been taken for more than a thousand years as part of a ritual initiation for Hopi young men. He added the proposed gondolas on either side of the confluence would go over the top of sites used for sacred ceremonies and construction of the Escalade would destroy Hopi sites. Some religious shrines and culturally important agave plants already have been destroyed in pre-development visits by the development team to the sites, he said.

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