



Published: 03.20.2008

## Senate OKs taxing powers for rock 'n' roll park

**By Howard Fischer**

*CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES*

PHOENIX — State senators agreed Wednesday to give private developers government-like taxing powers to pave the way for a proposed rock 'n' roll theme park in Eloy.

The preliminary approval came after supporters of the park beat back several amendments aimed at making sure the developers can't abuse the special powers SB 1450 gives them.

Senate Majority Leader Thayer Verschoor, R-Gilbert, who is shepherding the measure through the process, said the amendment restrictions would undermine the chances of the \$800 million park ever being built.

Hanging in the balance is a plan to convert 300 acres of private land in Eloy into a complex of rides, restaurants and hotels all built around the music from the 1950s forward.

Backers said they need the authority to form their own level of government on those lands, and be able to raise a tax of up to 9 percent on all activities within the park, to pay off the \$750 million that would be borrowed for construction.

Without that, they said, the park would not be built.

Sen. Robert Blendu, R-Litchfield Park, said there is no risk to the state, as the bonds would be privately insured. And the bill requires backers to first raise \$100 million from private sources.

Sen. Jorge Garcia, D-Tucson, said that's hardly enough to give organizers the opportunity to use their status as a state taxing district to borrow another \$750 million.

He said the requirement should be the same as it was three years ago, when lawmakers approved a similar plan for a proposed theme park in Williams. There, backers were told to first raise \$500 million privately before being allowed to borrow another \$1 billion.

Garcia said the state sets a bad precedent easing the requirement for someone else, and warned the Williams developers could come back seeking equal treatment.

But Blendu said there is no reason for additional hurdles for what organizers contend could be a park that would attract 6 million visitors a year.

"I thought we needed economic development in our state," he said.

"I don't care what they do," Blendu continued. "They're going to be providing jobs."

Sen. Ron Gould, R-Lake Havasu City, however, called it "ridiculous ... to commingle government and an amusement park."

But Sen. Victor Soltero, D-Tucson, said lawmakers sometimes need to "think out of the box."

"If we don't give it an opportunity to work, it never will work," he said.

All content copyright © 1999-2008 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers

and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.