

HB 2619 – sports and tourism authority; tourism; board Representative Vince Leach

The original Sports Authority, enacted six years ago, was designed to allow the voters of Pima County to:

- Create a Sports Authority
- Impose limited tourism-related taxes to raise money to:
 - Retain Major League Baseball spring training in Pima County
 - Build youth and amateur sports facilities
 - Allow for bonding to fund stadium construction and renovation
 - Other sports related tourism promotion.

The law was modeled after the Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority that was enacted by the legislature, approved by the Maricopa County voters and resulted in:

- Construction of the Cardinals Stadium
- Construction of spring training facilities throughout Maricopa County
- Enhancement of youth and amateur sports facilities
- General tourism promotion for the area's convention and visitors' bureaus.

Unfortunately, Major League Baseball left Pima County after spring training in 2010, which devastated further the region's tourism industry in the midst of the recession. Pima County, now, more than ever, needs to increase tourism promotion, enhance youth and amateur sports facilities to attract tourism-generating events, and retain existing and attract new flights to Tucson International Airport.

But, we no longer need bonding authority or the ability to construct stadium facilities.

- Yes, there are still improvements and maintenance requirements for youth and amateur facilities that will enable Pima County to host national and international sports tournaments
- Yes more than ever there is a critical need for tourism promotion funding to create events and grow visitor spending in Pima County
- Yes, retention and expansion of non-stop air service to Tucson is essential to attract more meetings and leisure travel to southern Arizona

What HB 2619 proposes is to:

- Markedly reduce the scope of the authority, by removing the bonding authority and eliminating the stadium construction provisions
- Slim down and update the authority board
- Maintain the voter-implementation requirements of the newly named Sports and Tourism Authority itself, as well as the tourism-related tax increases approved as part of the initial 2009 legislation
 - Assist with the operational expenses of county youth and amateur sports facilities (25% of all revenues)
 - Retain and expand non-stop air service to the destination (25% of all revenues)
 - Grow existing events, bring in and sustain one or more large-scale events, and market Tucson and southern Arizona to targeted travelers (50% of all revenues)
- Put forth a time frame during which the county can take the authority question to the voters at an annual election

HB 2619 makes the statutory authority smaller, more focused and easier to manage. It still exports most revenue production the voters approve and still requires voter approval for the creation of the authority.