

**Written Statement of D.L. Wilson, La Paz County Board of Supervisors
Before the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public
Lands, Forests, and Mining**

**Legislative Hearing - S. 4475 La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act
September 16, 2020**

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden and members of the committee - I appreciate the opportunity to submit a written statement for this hearing. I serve on the La Paz County Board of Supervisors. On behalf of the Board, I wish to express our support for the La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act (S. 4475). We appreciate the leadership of Senator Kyrsten Sinema and Senator Martha McSally on this legislation and are grateful to Cong. Paul Gosar for introducing companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

S. 4475 would convey 4,800 acres of federal land to La Paz County for fair market value. Over five years ago, we identified this acreage as ideal for future solar energy development given its close proximity to county and state lands that are now available for renewable energy development and associated transmission facilities. This legislation builds upon our strategic vision to attract economic development opportunities to provide good jobs for our underserved community.

La Paz County is 4,500 square miles of vast rural desert. Our community relies heavily on agriculture and tourism, which has been especially hard hit this year. In recent years, even prior to the pandemic, the county unemployment rate has remained at a high rate ranging between 7-8.4%. It is imperative that we strive to achieve the same economic diversification that has occurred elsewhere in Arizona. One major barrier to accomplishing that goal is that federal, state or tribal governments own almost 95% of the land within La Paz County. Historically, this land-use constraint has hampered our efforts.

A few years ago, the County embarked on a path to identify strategic sites where it could attract solar energy development and that effort produced extraordinary results. In 2019, Congress passed the La Paz County Land Conveyance Act as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Public Law 116-9). Through the process of passing that legislation, the county worked with regional stakeholders including the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) to include important language elevating the role of the CRIT in protecting archeological resources. This same language is included in this current bill.

On May 22, 2020, Secretary Bernhardt signed over the deed to the 5,900 acres to La Paz County, which was conveyed to the County for fair market value. The County has signed an agreement to develop the nation's largest photovoltaic solar project in the nation. It is anticipated the project will build up to 1,000 MW of solar which is enough to power 300,000 homes. The construction

phase will provide 800 - 1,000 high paying jobs for La Paz County. S. 4475 would continue to advance these successful efforts.

The La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act would convey 4,800 acres of federal land to the County adjacent to lands already being developed for renewable energy. Those lands include state lands and the 5,900 acres that were previously conveyed to the County in the Dingell Act. The property is also next to existing and proposed electric transmission facilities, natural gas lines, and fiber optic routes. The anticipated Ten West Transmission Line, which has the support of Natural Resources Defense Council and the Audubon Society, would have capacity to carry the anticipated energy load. Due to its proximity to an electric transmission corridor, the entire site will become a remarkable renewable energy park that would provide solar power to the region including both the Phoenix metro area and southern California. La Paz County anticipates full development of the site within 5-10 years. We are proud to facilitate a clean energy future for the southwest!

Most of all, this legislation is a catalyst for the creation of new, higher paying jobs for La Paz County residents. The County's permanent resident population is just under 21,000 with 38% of its residents over the age of 65. Nearly 27% of La Paz County residents are Latino who work primarily on farming operations. Over 18% of County residents are Native Americans and are members of the Colorado River Indian Tribes. Due to the lack of opportunity, the county unemployment rate has remained higher than the average. In addition to new employment, S. 4475 would expand the County's tax base, so it has the ability to provide services to its most vulnerable populations. In addition to job creation and an increased tax base, the County will also receive lease payments from the solar developers enabling additional economic development support, development of critical broadband availability and improvement in transportation infrastructure needed to support current and future economic drivers.

We thank the Committee for holding a hearing on this important legislation. The La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act would provide significant opportunities for a diverse economy in our rural county.