

Senators come to blind vendors' aid

By Rachael Conlin

LAS VEGAS SUN

Nevada senators have ensured that three Hoover Dam tourist shops will not be washed away by outside competition as their blind owners fight off the government's allegedly greedy hands.

Sen. Harry Reid and Richard Bryan, both Democrats, said Wednesday they have the word of the Bureau of Reclamation's top official that dam caretakers will not invite another business into the area while arguments over profit sharing continue.

The promise by bureau Commissioner Dan Beard is good news for the businessmen and Nevada Services to the Blind, which provides support and training to the three entrepreneurs and other legally blind Nevada vendors.

"This way we do not have to fight to push somebody out," Deputy Attorney General John Albrecht said. "Now we just have to deal with whether our people (blind businessmen) should be in there."

The state attorney general's office recently filed an arbitration complaint. The businessmen filed a separate lawsuit last month in an attempt to tie bureau officials' hands until the conflict is resolved.

Owners Bert Hansen and Kae Pohe expected to move their businesses this summer into the bottom floor of a newly constructed parking garage at Hoover Dam. But packing plans stopped when dam officials decided they wanted Hansen, Pohe and third owner Gene Wilson to share some of their wealth.

The businessmen and Nevada Services to the Blind maintain

County resolving conflict over courthouse burgers

SUN STAFF REPORTS

A conflict between Clark County and blind vendors who want to sell burgers and fries in the yet-unopened Family Courts Building is close to being resolved, attorneys say.

Nevada Services to the Blind sued the county in January for allegedly discriminating against blind people.

Nevada law mirrors federal law, which gives blind people priority in operating food services in public buildings. The Nevada Services to the Blind provides legally blind Nevadans with financial assistance and training.

The suit alleged that contract requirements for blind vendors were much stiffer than those for non-disabled vendors. The county said the conditions were needed to ensure food quality and protect families and juveniles involved in court litigation.

But negotiations between Deputy Attorney General John Albrecht and Clark County Deputy District Attorney Chuck Howser appear to have resulted in a solution.

"I predict success without litigation," Howser said.

The courthouse at the corner of Pecos and Bonanza roads will open this month.

that federal law does not permit a government agency from profiting from its arrangement with the vendors.

"There are legitimate issues that need to be resolved, but until that is done, no new promises should be made to other parties seeking to take over operations," Bryan said in a prepared statement.

The bureau contends that receiving 10 percent of the businesses' gross revenue would help replace money the government agency has lost as a result of a shrinking congressional appropriation.

The businessmen argue dam officials are just trying to offset the costs of a \$120 million visitor center and parking garage. Financed over 50 years, the visitor center project will cost \$435.5 million, to be paid by

Arizona, Nevada and California power users.

The businessmen contend the additional burden would break them and the state's blind vendor program, which receives no public funding. They already pay 50 percent of their net income to Nevada's Services to the Blind.

"We are asking the Bureau of Reclamation to treat the blind vendors with fairness and respect," Reid said. "They should not unfairly have their business taken from them."



STEVE MARCUS / STAFF

BLIND VENDORS Kae Pohe, left, Gene Wilson, kneeling, and Bert Hansen are fighting for their new businesses at Hoover Dam.