

Both sides agree TRPA dysfunctional; SB271's future uncertain

By Anne Knowles

CARSON CITY – A hearing on the bill to withdraw Nevada from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency closed today with opponents and supporters of the legislation agreeing the agency is dysfunctional and in need of reform, but differing on how to overhaul it.

The Assembly Government Affairs committee ended two days of testimony and will consider Senate Bill 271 during a work session at its next meeting. If the bill passes out of the committee, it moves to the full Assembly for a vote before the end of the legislative session on June 6. If it passes there, SB271 will go to the desk of Gov. Brian Sandoval, who is expected to sign the legislation.



The biggest sticking point seemed to be the bill's provision to withdraw from the TRPA if reforms outlined in the legislation do not occur, with proponents saying nothing will change if there aren't consequences to inaction and critics saying that such a threat kills any chance of negotiating with California legislators to fix problems at the bi-state regulatory body.

"Secretary of State (Ross) Miller said withdrawing from the TRPA would be irresponsible," said Joe Johnson, co-chair of the legislative committee at the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter in Reno, referring to testimony from Miller, who introduced an amendment to the bill at Wednesday's meeting. "We think the threat of withdrawal is irresponsible as well."

The bill has sparked useful discussion between California and

Nevada, said Kyle Davis, political and policy director, Nevada Conservation League & Education Fund in Reno.

“Let’s let the negotiations between the two states continue,” he said before the committee. “The deadline to withdraw removes any incentive for those opposed to the TRPA to negotiate. They’ll just wait out the clock.”

But Assemblywoman Marilyn Kirkpatrick, D-North Las Vegas, chairwoman of the committee, said if the bill helped jumpstart a discussion between the two states, then the threat of withdrawal played an important part.

“What’s a different hammer than withdrawal,” that would be effective, asked Kirkpatrick.

Supporters of the bill believe it will hasten change at the agency instead of force Nevada out.

“When this bill first dropped, I talked about all the problems I had with the bill, all on the record,” said Leo Drozdoff, director of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for Nevada. But various amendments to the bill addressed his concerns, he said.

“The best way for Lake Tahoe to be protected is to have a strong TRPA,” Drozdoff said. “And the best way to have a successful TRPA is to pass this bill.”

Drozdoff’s department contributed the section of the bill that garnered near unanimous support. Section 22.5 delegates more decision-making to local entities. The goal is to address concerns of homeowners at the lake who complain it takes years to get approval to make changes to their homes and properties that have no environmental impact on the lake.

“The TRPA is so draconian” that homeowners can’t fix cracked driveways without approval from the agency, said Sen. John Lee, D-Las Vegas, who with Sen. James Settelmeyer, R-Minden,

sponsored SB271.

“When the TRPA first started there were 16,000 additional building lots available. It was like Disneyland for developers,” Lee said. “But 90 percent of that is built out now and we no longer need a regulatory body to oversee everything. We need one to oversee environmental issues.”

Government Affairs has not posted its next meeting, when it will take up a work session on SB271 and likely vote, but during the session it was scheduled to meet every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.