



Schweikert opposes freeway through Ahwatukee

by **Cathryn Creno** - Nov. 12, 2010 01:55 PM
The Arizona Republic

David Schweikert, the newly elected representative for Congressional District 5, is not in office yet, but he already is saying "no" to **construction** of a freeway through Ahwatukee and the South Mountain Preserve.

"I am not in favor of putting schools and the community at risk with a freeway corridor through Ahwatukee," the Fountain Hills Republican said in an interview when asked about the South Mountain Freeway.

Current plans call for the freeway - a 22-mile extension of Loop 202 that would connect Laveen to Chandler - to **take out** a church and more than 100 homes in Ahwatukee Foothills and cut through three ridges in the preserve.

Schweikert said he believes freeway noise and pollution would endanger area residents and school children. He said he also dislikes the idea of cutting through South Mountain.

The man Schweikert defeated in the Nov. 2 elections, U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, a Tempe Democrat, pushed in the last year for **talks** to move the freeway alignment south of Ahwatukee to flat, vacant land on the Gila River Indian Community.

State and Gila River officials have been meeting since August to discuss two possible routes through the reservation.

There are unconfirmed reports that talks are going well and an agreement to move the

freeway path about a half-mile south of Ahwatukee onto tribal land could be reached by the end of the year.

"Congressman Mitchell and I have basically been saying the same thing on the freeway," Schweikert said. "I want to protect my community and my constituents. I also want to be fair to the Gila River community."

Gila River officials, including GRIC Gov. William Rhodes, have said the primary motivation for the freeway talks is not economic. Rather, they say they are interested in protecting the ecology of South Mountain.

But Schweikert, who was a state legislator in the early 1990s, when Arizona negotiated with the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community construction of Loop 101 on tribal land instead of in Scottsdale, said economic benefits can't be ignored.

"Look at the commercial and industrial development that is going on along the 101," Schweikert said. "A lot of the infrastructure - the sewer lines and drainage that make development possible - was put in during the freeway construction."