

## Toll proposal puts the brakes on economic recovery

**By BUSTER JOHNSON**

**Chairman**

**Mohave County Board of Supervisors**

During the January 10 meeting of the Mohave County Board of Supervisors, we unanimously voted to oppose the state's proposal to turn a 30-mile segment of Interstate 15 into a toll road. Now, Arizona State Rep. Karen Fann has launched legislation that would open the gates to toll roads throughout the state.

Fann's House Bill 2358, titled Public-Private Partnership; Toll Facilities, creates regulations for collection of tolls and a variety of punishments for those who do not pay them. Specifically, it allows the suspending or revoking of vehicle registrations and driver's licenses.

This long-winded bill sets up procedures for toll agencies to track and nail anyone who has "liability for toll nonpayment" throughout the state. HB 2358 is the legal foundation that will be used for the furtherance of toll roads, toll bridges and other toll transportation facilities (read rest stops) in Arizona.

I understand the traditional toll facility proposals. A major bridge or road is built through bonded indebtedness and, when it opens for use, customers pay a toll that eventually pays off the cost of construction. But to

establish a precedent of charging tolls to use pre-existing roads and bridges is a terrible wrong turn that Arizona does not need to make.

If our State Legislature passes HB 2358, the gates will be opened for many toll proposals leading to costly trips. Driving Arizona highways will no longer be enjoying the open road. It will be more like traversing a board game with costly detours and, if you avoid a toll booth, an expensive Get Out Of Jail fee. The state slogan will become, "You can't get there from here."

Okay, that was a bit facetious, but in an age where we are trying to get business back to health and America back to work, HB 2358 sets up roadblocks to prosperity. Truckers who have to take the highways and interstates will be hit the hardest with new fees. At the end of the line, those costs will be passed on to retail customers. Those same customers will have to pay tolls on the roads bringing their more-expensive purchases home.

We will bring more prosperity and transportation funds to Arizona by removing roadblocks to economic development; not by adding them. This Board of Supervisors opposed the state's proposal of putting a toll on I-15 and I oppose HB 2358, which would drive more toll proposals and bring economic recovery to a screeching halt.