

EDITORIALS



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Our View: Power line sparks opposition

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The New Mexican

Just because a project carries the name “verde” doesn’t mean it is actually green — that is, good for people and the environment.

And so it is with the Verde Transmission Line, pro- posed to connect two Public Service Company of New Mexico substations from the Norton Substation in Santa Fe County to the Ojo Substation northwest of Española. The 345-kilovolt overhead line planned by Hunt Power of Texas is designed to strengthen New Mexico’s electric grid and increase the capacity to transport power, whether from traditional fossil-fuel sources or renewable energy.

Trouble is, that increased capacity could come at the risk of one of New Mexico’s most precious resources, the natural beauty of the sky and land. Views are more than just an aesthetic feature to people in Northern New Mexico. They are appreciated for adding to our way of life, but more practically, the natural beauty of the place attracts tourists, movie makers and retirees who want to spend their time basking in striking scenery. New Mexico can’t afford to lose these unparalleled viewscapes.

There are questions, too, about whether the power carried across the proposed lines — built at an estimated cost of \$60 million to \$80 million — would serve New Mexicans, or become instead a way for Hunt Power to transport energy and make a handsome profit. Other line opponents believe such a line is a health risk and its construction would damage property values. Still more questions center on the effect of power lines on wildlife, especially migratory birds. Already, some 100 people have turned out at a meeting on the proposal to oppose the power line, which has been in the planning stages since 2010.

Part of the planning will be figuring out just how the line would affect the people who live nearby. What does it do to cultural and environmental resources? It’s complicated because the transmission line crosses near or on federal, tribal, state and local lands.

Several area pueblos stand to gain because of right-of-way dollars; San Ildefonso Pueblo, on the other hand, is concerned about the line’s impact on its access to the Black Mesa and neighboring El Rancho. This project is creating divisions among neighbors, never a good thing, especially in an area where residents have been

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squabbling over road access, rights of way and water. That some of the disputes are along ethnic lines makes the situation even more volatile.

The Bureau of Land Management is tallying responses to the proposal as part of its work on the required environmental impact statement. That could be ready for public review in the fall of 2017, with a final statement coming out a year later, in the fall of 2018. One option for the BLM is to check the “no build” box.

That means the power line — like others proposed in the past — would remain in the planning stages (or be submitted under a President Donald Trump, whose disdain for environmental regulations is unparalleled).

For the line to be rejected under current law, however, citizens from all walks of life, including local and tribal governments, must weigh in forcefully and by the January deadline. Northern New Mexico residents have shown, time and time again, that they are ready to stand together to protect their land. That resolve, it seems, is necessary once more.

Send your comments about the proposed Verde Transmission Line before Jan. 5 by email to BLM_NM_Verde@blm.gov or by mail to Bureau of Land Management, Verde Transmission Line Project, P.O. Box 27115, Santa Fe, NM, 87502-0115.

A common defense

Some good news for this holiday season.

Last week, a Muslim woman shopping at an Albuquerque Smith’s store was confronted by an angry customer who began yelling at her, reportedly saying such things as, “Get out of our country; you don’t belong here; you’re a terrorist.”

The hijab-wearing woman wasn’t alone, though, despite the unwarranted harassment. Other customers ran to support her, and store employees stopped what they were doing to come to the woman’s aid. Another woman went over to the Muslim shopper and gave her a hug. Employees corralled the woman who was accosting her fellow shopper and got her out of the store.

The harasser wasn’t satisfied, apparently. She waited in the parking lot for the Muslim woman to leave the store. Smith’s employees escorted her to her car and helped her with her groceries, effectively creating a protective shield.

This collective action — defense of a stranger — is something that we need to see more of in the United States. The Council on American-Islamic Relations has reported a spike in incidents targeting Muslims and other minorities in recent months, ugliness that has only worsened since the Nov. 8 presidential election. Attacking people for their faith is about as un-American as it gets, and all citizens must speak out so this ugliness stops.

Such acts of prejudice and cowardice are not acceptable in this United States. Citizens can — and should — defend each other from hateful actions. The Muslim shopper should not have been harassed. But when it happened, we are heartened to see that the people around her had her back.

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