

My Turn

Gov. Martinez seizes our energy potential

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Gov. Susana Martinez has just issued a new energy policy for the state of New Mexico, as described in the article by *The New Mexican* reporter Steve Terrell in *The Taos News* of Sept. 17-23. It is entitled "Seizing our Energy Potential: Creating a More Diverse Economy in New Mexico."

The plan was apparently put together by the state's Energy Minerals & Natural Resources Department (ENMRD) under the aegis of David Martin, the Secretary of the department. Incidentally, under the ENMRD is the Energy Conservation and Management Division, that is dedicated to a clean energy future for New Mexico.

In her introduction to the new state energy plan, Martinez says, "Together, we can seize our energy potential and create the kind of thriving, diverse economy we need to ensure a brighter future and greater opportunities for our children and families long-term security of our country and the general welfare of New Mexico's citizens."

And that is exactly what we need, a diverse energy portfolio involving solar, wind, geothermal, biomass-sourced, and nuclear. These are all mentioned in the plan, with some pros and cons for each. It is also pointed out that oil and gas are currently providing a substantial revenue stream in New Mexico, from which we all benefit. These are being rapidly expanded by fracking in areas of the state rich in shale deposits. We also have two huge coal-fired plants generating electricity, with two others having been retired.

As one reads through the state energy plan one begins to realize that Susana is enamored of her fossil fuel revenue stream and wants to promote it as the major base for New Mexico's future energy source: "To make informed energy decisions, the New Mexico public and decision makers must have accurate information about the pros and cons of energy systems and advances in technologies. The state has a role to play in this area to provide high quality, unbiased information, make information readily accessible, and facilitate information sharing among groups."

I say yes to that. Except that it won't be "unbiased" under the new plan. The plan states that "Many New Mexicans do not understand the importance of either the oil and gas industry or the overall energy industry to the state." and further: "San Juan Basin coal could be transported to foreign markets, including the European Union and Mexico, if an infrastructure project to extend freight rail service to San Juan County were realized. "

There is not a single mention of global warming or climate change. The emphasis overall is strongly on the development of oil and gas reserves. There is no sense of urgency concerning “natural” disasters occurring across the globe due to the burning of fossil fuels.

This is especially disappointing when one considers that by covering a mere 0.5 percent of the surface of the state of New Mexico with solar panels we could supply enough sustainable electricity for the entire United States. This is primarily to illustrate the abundance of free energy available to us, using technologies currently available. If we don't switch from fossil fuels in the very near future, I fear there will be many more Californias burning.

I'm glad to see I am by no means alone in this. I was especially pleased by the op-ed from Erik Schlenker-Goodrich in *The Taos News* of Sept. 24-30. I would disagree, however, with his statement that “ ... we must invest in communities, not corporations.” I say we must invest in both if we are going to bring energy innovations to scale.

Robert M. Fitch, Ph.D., is a resident of Taos and the author of the forthcoming handbook on warming and climate change, referenced in this article.