

# Our View: A shot in the arm for renewable power

**The New Mexican | Posted: Sunday, August 24, 2014 7:00 pm**

A bit of good news for New Mexico's economy — it appears the much-discussed and anticipated SunZia transmission line to generate wind and solar energy for Western states is going to be built.

The line, stretching across Southern New Mexico, almost didn't happen. The U.S. Department of Defense was concerned it would interfere with military missions from nearby White Sands Missile Range. That opposition nearly stalled the project, especially as such figures as Gov. Susana Martinez and U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce, both Republicans, opposed any project that might impact defense.

However, Democratic U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich worked diligently to forge a compromise that would safeguard the military mission but also open New Mexico to the possibility of being the site of a new energy line. Heinrich announced earlier this month that the 515-mile transmission line has a "high probability" of being built across New Mexico and Arizona. Heinrich's hard work behind the scenes for jobs and sustainability deserves recognition. He refused to give up.

The compromise occurred because SunZia agreed to bury sections of its transmission line, despite an increase in the project's cost. And it's not cheap in the first place, with initial estimates for line construction at \$1.2 billion. Because the project remains alive, so do the prospects of thousands of construction jobs. A study by New Mexico State University and the University of Arizona projects some 43,000 construction jobs, with 18,000 of those in New Mexico.

An environmental analysis must be completed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management for the project to go ahead (the line starts in Lincoln County and would end in Arizona's Pinal County). Of course, the line should be built in a manner that respects the wild country it will pass through. Energy can't trump the environment. Other opposition remains in Arizona, where skeptics do not believe the project is feasible. Critics say it can't happen unless and until California utilities commit to buying blocks of power for the project.

However, the SunZia officials say they believe the market exists to transport wind energy across the West — it's a matter of economics. Private investors wouldn't be ready to sink millions into building the infrastructure unless they believed they would make money. Without transmission lines, developers of large-scale renewable energy won't be able to take their product to market. When that can happen, the country truly can begin depending on renewable sources of power. New Mexico should be a part of that transformation.