



NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION FROM THE OFFICE OF DISTRICT 5 COMMISSIONER SANDY JONES

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Three PRC commissioners kill plan for community solar farm in Dona Ana County

*“This is a sad day for Dona Ana County ... no solar farm, no jobs, no economic development, no capital investment.” –
PRC Chairman Sandy Jones*

SANTA FE, NM – Three Public Regulation Commissioners – Cynthia Hall, Valerie Espinoza and Lynda Lovejoy – today killed a plan to bridge the renewable accessibility gap and make solar power available to low-income Dona Ana County residents.

“I’m shocked that these three commissioners voted against struggling families and in favor of powerful special interest groups without bothering to hear the merits of the proposal,” said PRC Chairman Sandy Jones.

In April, El Paso Electric Company (EPE) asked for PRC approval to establish a voluntary community solar program aimed at households that have been cut out of the clean energy market. According to the application, EPE would construct, own, and operate a two-megawatt solar facility which would supply energy to the program.

Opponents, including Santa-Fe based New Energy Economy (NEE), claimed the plan was too expensive and should be dismissed. Instead, Jones last week asked EPE to reissue a request for proposals to determine if any bidders could provide a lower overall cost for customers. He also called a hearing for Tuesday, November 27. The order received full commission support, yet Hall, Espinoza, and Lovejoy today flipped and voted to dismiss the application.

“New Energy Economy’s executive director, Mariel Nanasi, lives in a million-dollar solar-powered home in Santa Fe and she has the gall to tell low-income families living 300 miles away that they can’t have access to clean, affordable electricity,” the chairman argued. “Intervenor Merrie Lee Soules lives in a \$400,000, solar-powered home in Las Cruces, and now thanks to her, low-income households will continue to carry a higher energy burden which escalates economic hardship.”

This year, Nanasi succeeded in killing a number of renewable energy projects, including a geothermal plant in Hidalgo County, upgrades to a wind farm on the eastern plains intended to improve output, and a solar project which would have powered rural homes, schools, and businesses in central New Mexico.

“No’ Energy Economy has done more to harm the environment than any coal miner,” Jones stated.

Intervenors in the case also included the City of Las Cruces, City of Albuquerque and German-owned PNE Wind USA.

“The opposition’s argument that the project cost is too high is the height of hypocrisy since the City of Las Cruces is spending taxpayer money on a high-dollar Santa Fe attorney to cheat low-income families,” said Jones. “Furthermore, Nanasi, Soules, and PNE Wind attorney Bruce Throne, also from Santa Fe, are financing PRC candidates in an attempt to buy influence.”

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“Forty-two states have community solar programs on-line; yet New Mexico keeps kicking the can down the road,” said Jones. “The program did not have to die because of alleged cost issues. El Paso Electric had already reissued a request for proposals and several advocates were prepared to come to Santa Fe to tell us why they are in favor of the project. Unfortunately for them, NEE got to Commissioner Hall and she set all this in motion. I guess Commissioner Hall only represents the affluent.”

According to market analysis and advisory firm GTM Research, the nation’s community solar market could grow up to 80 times its current size by 2030, which equates to serving nearly nine million new solar customers, including four million low-to-moderate income households, and amounting to \$120 billion in capital investments.

“This is a sad day for Dona Ana County,” said Jones. “No solar farm, no jobs, no economic development, no capital investment – all thanks to Mariel Nanasi, Merrie Lee Soules, the City of Las Cruces, and PNE Wind.”

The New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (PRC) regulates the utilities, telecommunications, and motor carrier industries to ensure fair and reasonable rates, and to assure reasonable and adequate services to the public as provided by law. The PRC promotes public safety through the offices of State Fire Marshal, the Firefighter Training Academy, Pipeline Safety Bureau, and Transportation Division.