

Sandoval snubs NV Energy lobbyists with veto

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval entered office with an impressive resume and sterling reputation, a moderate-to-conservative governor for a moderate-to-conservative state.

If there was a criticism, it was that he, like many Nevada politicians who climb the ranks, was too close to the traditional interests that pull the levers of power in the state.

Some are rethinking those assumptions, however, after Sandoval vetoed a bill rammed through the Legislature at the last minute.

The legislation was Assembly Bill 416, which was pushed by NV Energy, the state's powerful electric monopoly that once employed Sandoval, and its hired lobbyists, Pete Ernaut and Greg Ferraro, the friends Sandoval credits with first suggesting he leave the federal bench to run for governor.

They both later served as volunteer campaign managers.

The veto “demonstrated he's not owned by anybody. He's his own man,” said Susan Fisher, a Nevada lobbyist who represented Valley Electric Association, a rural utility co-op, which opposed the bill. “It put to rest a lot of questions and rumors swirling around even before (Sandoval's) election. These buddies, are they going to tell him how to vote? Clearly, no.”

Timothy Hay, a former state consumer advocate forced out when Sandoval was attorney general, said, “I think it showed the governor has enough independence to look beyond the short-term

politics of legislation, to the long-term impacts of energy policy. It's a refreshingly good sign to me."

The transmission bill was NV Energy's top legislative priority. It would have allowed the utility to build transmission lines to export power using Nevada ratepayer money to fund it, a policy that critics said risked as much as \$1 billion in consumer financing.

Not only the legislation was questioned. It was the way it passed.

NV Energy lobbyists, including Ferraro and Ernaut, pushed to get the language passed in the final hour of the session, after traditional avenues to pass legislation failed. The *Sun* detailed the last-minute maneuvering and the fact that some lawmakers didn't know what they had voted for.

Read the whole story