

Nevada scrutinizing renewable energy options

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval this week issued an executive order directing a state agency and task force to assess the regional market for Nevada’s renewable energy resources.

In a briefing with Sandoval senior adviser Dale Erquiaga and Nevada State Office of Energy Director Stacey Crowley, it was explained that the assessment is intended to help determine if alternative energy resources can be developed in the state for transmission to California to meet its ambitious alternative energy goals.

The order directs the New Energy Industry Task Force to facilitate “the timely development of transmission facilities and renewable energy resources in this state”

Crowley said she expects to name the 11 members of the task force by Dec. 1, with the goal of having a first meeting before the end of the year. A technical advisory committee will also be appointed, with representatives from the Public Utilities Commission, among others, to assist in the charge given the panel by Sandoval.

Erquiaga said clean energy is one of the sectors identified in the report released last week by the Brookings Institution and SRI International offering guidance to Sandoval and policy makers on economic diversification and new job creation. The report identifies seven economic sectors, some already in existence such as gaming and tourism, and some emerging such as clean energy, where Nevada should focus its efforts.

“How do we get a market for clean energy generated in this

state?" Erquiaga asked. "We have to be able to put it on the grid and transmit it, really, to the hungry market over the hill in California."

Erquiaga said the transmission line discussion has been going on for some time, particularly by NV Energy.

"Part of this conversation is about the 'where' the stuff goes, part of this conversation is about the business case; if we generate it, will they buy it," he said.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has also issued an order mandating that areas of the U.S. look at the regional development of transmission lines, Crowley said.

Crowley's office will oversee the work of the task force, which is an existing statutory committee. The panel has until Aug. 1, 2012, to report to Sandoval on the business case for the production and transmission of renewable energy for both native and regional requirements.

The deadline is to ensure enough time for the drafting of any legislation that may be needed to implement the task force recommendations, and to allow for any budgetary considerations.

"We need to understand the costs associated with that transmission, and the benefits to Nevadans, whether it be new tax base, job creation, etc.," Crowley said. "So those numbers need to be determined in order for us to make a business case to say, California we think we can give you our renewable energy. We may have to build some transmission lines to get there, but it will still be worth it for you, there is still value in it for both states."

Crowley said California has a goal of obtaining 33 percent of its energy needs through alternative sources by 2020.

Nevada's goal is 25 percent of its energy consumption coming

from alternative energy by 2025.

Erquiaga said Nevada officials are working closely with California Gov. Jerry Brown's staff on the potential of supplying alternative energy to the state. Brown and Sandoval discussed the issue at an energy summit in Las Vegas in August, he said.