

NV Energy plots path to make money without coal

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

Sen. Harry Reid arrived in Carson City on a Wednesday in February, commandeered an office at the Legislature and sat down with state Sen. Kelvin Atkinson to hatch a plan.

A sweeping proposal to move coal out of Nevada's energy mix had incubated for months among a group of powerful and influential politicians, business executives and lobbyists before they stepped forward and selected Atkinson to help execute it – at least publicly.

What emerged from that meeting was a legislative power play reaching from D.C. to Nevada that illustrates how consummate insiders can dictate energy cost and policy for every Nevadan for the next decade.

The big idea: Nevada would cease its investments in three coal-fired power plants and NV Energy, the state's energy monopoly, would get to build expensive gas and renewable energy power plants – a cost that ratepayers would have to bear.

In a state with nearly the highest energy costs in the Mountain West region and a growing renewable energy sector, a potentially risky shift from coal to gas and alternative-energy plants could have been momentous or disastrous for Nevada residents, businesses, energy providers and politicians.

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