



OPINIONS

Why New Mexico should lead the new nuclear era

By President & Director of the Clean Energy Association of New Mexico (and the Chief Executive Officer & Director of Verdera Energy Corp. Janet Lee-Sheriff



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New Mexico hates uranium!

To hear some people say it, you might think that statement is the gospel truth. "Of course, New Mexico hates uranium – look at what happened." And we must acknowledge that sentiment honestly. Many communities, especially tribal nations, still carry the consequences of the past uranium operations carried out in an era of weak oversight, limited knowledge, and thus limited safeguards.

But here's the truth that often gets lost: the industry that created those harms no longer exists.

MEET THE NEW INDUSTRY

On the way to the gym this morning I was reflecting on something nearly unbelievable: not too long ago, people smoked on airplanes. We even had 'non-smoking sections' on flights and in restaurants, as if a sign could contain cigarette smoke. Anyone born after 2000 probably thinks this sounds as real as Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble cruising around in stone cars.

Times have changed;

policies have changed. And why? Because we learn. We adapt. We do better.

New Mexico is in that exact moment with nuclear energy and uranium. The practices of 50 years ago are not the practices of today. No more smoking on planes. No more smoking in restaurants. And absolutely no more mining uranium the way we "used to."

A NEW APPROACH TO TRIBAL RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Today, the conversation is shifting – not just toward modern standards, but toward modern relationships. Because what if, this time, we have a company that is deeply interested in Tribal relations – not just developing projects, but in developing trusts? A company that believes community engagement is not a box to check, but a commitment.

A company whose philosophy is simple: Let's bring the community along. Let's work together.

This is not the top-down, "announce and defend" model of the past. This is cultural and educational exchange – the kind that the Clean Energy Association of New Mexico champions. This is an approach grounded in listening, transparency, and respect. It means ensuring that local communities, Tribal governments, and citizens have access to the process. After all, this is what responsible development should look like.

Speaking of her past experience with working with the First Nations in Canada, CLEAN's President & Director, Janet Lee-Sheriff, commented "We worked closely with the affected First Nations in Canada, produced gold which was then turned into gold coins that featured art from the First Nation artists who were paid in cash, gold, and received national recognition for their work, all while negotiating benefits and socio-economic agreements with the First Nations which included significant local benefits. It remains one of the highlights of my career."

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR NEW MEXICO'S FUTURE

The U.S. is rebuilding its nuclear capacity – a Nuclear Renaissance driven by clean

energy needs and national security. New Mexico holds the largest, highest-grade uranium resources in the nation, meaning New Mexico is center stage of a national dialogue. New Mexico will play a key role, and we are confident we have the know-how and the motivation to shape how it happens this time around.

Someone once said, "If we don't remember our history, we are doomed to repeat it" and I believe it is important to remember our history – but we must not be confined to it. Modern nuclear projects create high-wage technical jobs, bring investment to rural communities, and offer real partnership with tribal governments who now hold a decisive voice.

THE CLEAN CONFERENCE: NEW MEXICO NO LONGER JUST A SPECTATOR, BUT A PARTICIPANT

This is why the upcoming CLEAN Nuclear in New Mexico: Fueling the U.S. Nuclear Renaissance Conference – April 19-22, at Santa Ana Pueblo – matters so deeply. This inaugural conference will bring together tribal leaders, researchers, policymakers, communities, and industry experts.

New Mexico has an opportunity to lead an industry built on responsibility, transparency and trust – not on the mistakes of the past.