

# Ground broken on CPV Sentinel power plant in Desert Hot Springs

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Officials line up Thursday at the ground-breaking of the CPV Sentinel power plant in Desert Hot Springs (from left): Alex Urquhart, CEO of GE Energy Financial Services; Riverside County Supervisors John J. Benoit and Marion Ashley; Douglas Egan, CEO of Competitive Power Ventures; Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez, D-Coachella; Gary Lambert, CPV president; Assemblyman Brian Nestande, R-Palm Desert; Desert Hot Springs Mayor Yvonne Parks; Bo Buchynsky, senior vice president of Diamond Generating Corp.; and John Murphy, CPV senior vice president. / K Kaufmann The Desert Sun

Written by **K Kaufmann, The Desert Sun**

Inland Empire labor leader Bill Perez took the podium at Thursday's groundbreaking for Competitive Power Ventures' Sentinel natural gas power plant in Desert Hot Springs with the sound of bulldozers in the background.

"That's not noise," said Perez, business manager for the Riverside and San Bernardino Counties Building and Construction Trades Council. "That's music."

Perez was among a dozen-plus speakers at the event, all of whom talked about the jobs and economic benefits CPV Sentinel would create and the community effort that pulled the 800-megawatt project through a rocky, four-year approval process.

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“Success has 1,000 fathers,” said Alex Urquhart, president and CEO of GE Energy Financial Services, one of the companies partnering with Competitive Power on the \$900 million project.

“It was the water person; it was the air person; it was the power contracting; it was the financing.”

On the job side, more than 30 workers are already on-site, preparing for construction, and Perez expects 300-350 to be hired during the two-year building period. Recruitment will be through union hiring halls in the Coachella Valley and the surrounding region, he said.

Other economic benefits include a projected \$30 million in sales taxes during construction and about \$6.4 million per year in property taxes, Supervisor John J. Benoit said.

The project is designed as a “peaker” plant, with natural gas turbines that allow it to fire up in 10 minutes, providing immediate power at times of high demand and critical backup for the intermittent power from the region's solar and wind projects.

Natural gas peaker plants such as CPV Sentinel are seen by many as essential to California's ability to meet its goal of using 33 percent renewable energy by 2020.

The plant's location on 37 acres near wind farms along Dillon Road and right next to Southern California Edison's Devers Substation were key selling points for Competitive Power, CEO Douglas Egan said.

The Maryland-based company has a 10-year contract for the power with Edison, but after that could sell power to other companies, he said.

Plans for the project hit a low point in 2008, after a lawsuit against the South Coast Air Quality Management District shut down the agency's ability to provide emission-reduction credits for such projects.

The plant was not directly involved in the case but was one of several projects affected.

Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez, D-Coachella, was praised for his efforts in 2009 to push through a law that allowed the air quality district to circumvent the lawsuit and issue the project reduction credits.

Pérez pointed to the law's provisions that required Competitive Power to pay \$60 million in air quality mitigation fees to the district. About one-third of the money will return to the valley for air quality improvement projects, said Will Mitchell, a spokesman for Competitive Power.

Assemblyman Brian Nestande, R-Palm Desert, called Pérez's work on the law outstanding but took a jab at California's reputation for being unfriendly to business.

“It should not take this long to build projects,” he said. “We have to review and take a look at our regulatory process. I hope we make future projects easier to do.”