

Development of the Marquette Energy Center is wisest course

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Scott Dianda , Mining Journal

The approval of the Marquette Energy Center has sparked a plethora of conversation in the workplace, in local coffee shops and across the dinner table.

I have received numerous phone calls and correspondence from constituents asking where I stood on the matter. While most of the conversations have focused around the approved rate increase, I would like to add a different perspective as to why this was the most responsible decision.

The Marquette Board of Light and Power has an obligation to serve their community. It is community owned, operated and regulated by the citizens they serve through elected officials that are chosen by you.

What makes a municipal utility so special is our ability to have a say in the direction and decisions that enable us to provide affordable, reliable, and clean energy generation. This is our democracy at work and many other communities across the state cannot boast this claim.

There is no doubt that the Upper Peninsula has unique energy challenges, but the other options and proposals are not going to yield the best rates and outcomes for customers.

One solution, House Bill 4575 proposed in Lansing, would build a transmission line across the Straits of Mackinac to connect the U.P. with the Lower Peninsula. This transmission line project could cost upwards of \$1 billion dollars and those costs would be paid for by customers across the state. This is ridiculously expensive and it does not solve our reliability issues for the Marquette area.

Since I have been in Lansing, I have been a strong proponent to keep generating our own energy here at home. A new generation facility at the Cleveland Cliffs Tilden Mine would be an ideal option to generate power in the U.P., but this option comes with expensive transmission costs and upgrades.

Locally, this is estimated to cost \$140 million dollars over 40 years and Marquette would not own any of these energy generating assets. On top of that, this estimate does not include the cost of energy and the city of Marquette would lose out on precious revenue that is used to fund essential public services and programs.

Another option is to purchase power from Invenergy, an electric provider based out of Chicago. Here, customers would send their money and existing jobs out of the Marquette area. This would hurt our economic growth and diminish the vitality of our communities.

None of these options work in our best interest and all are extremely expensive when you compare it to the costs of constructing the new Marquette Energy Center. Additionally, doing nothing means that outsiders, unknowing to our unique needs, get to determine our energy future.

The Marquette Board of Light and Power has played an integral role in the community for over 125 years. All of their offices are located right in Marquette, creating local jobs for our neighbors and friends who provide exemplary customer service to nearly 17,000 residents throughout Marquette County. What is important to understand is their commitment and dedication to the communities they serve by providing cost-effective and reliable electric service. This is not an asset we want to throw away or take for granted.

The decision made by the Marquette City Commission and the Marquette Board of Light and Power to build the new Marquette Energy Center comes after three years of extensive planning to ensure there is reliable electric service in our communities for many decades to come.

Not only was it the most cost-effective option, but it gives us the ability to diversify our energy portfolio and invest in clean energy options.

From an economic standpoint, it will move Marquette to a more sustainable future by providing reliable energy to attract and retain businesses. By generating our own energy, we help ourselves create local jobs and we keep our money in the local economy.

In my opinion, this was the most responsible decision and we should take pride in the fact that we took our energy future into our own hands.

Editor's note: State Rep. Scott Dianda, D-Calumet, represents the 110th District which includes Baraga, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw and Ontonagon counties as well as a portion of Marquette County.

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