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It has been almost a year since San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) prevailed in receiving the final go-ahead in building the Sunrise Powerlink through the Alpine community. With this step, SDG&E overcame its last major hurdle in the race to finalize the project and begin construction despite concerns among residents and evidence of the disruption this action would cause.

Now federal and state court challenges are pressing ahead in the hope that legal roadblocks exist. Anticipating a favorable outcome, SDG&E is moving forward with construction and all of us -- myself included -- have felt the impact directly. It is now up to SDG&E to do its part and work as quickly and efficiently as possible to limit any hindrances to the community and ensure that life returns to normal for residents living near or traveling through construction areas.

It was no secret that the portion of the Powerlink in question would be constructed underground, even though the necessity of building below the town's main business thoroughfare of Alpine Boulevard was never sufficiently explained. This includes the risk to public safety by creating a massive construction zone in close proximity to an elementary school, community center and local park. Assurances have been given that every action will be taken to mitigate this disruption and, while the disruption might be inconvenient now, it's far outweighed by the energy efficiency and independence the region will gain for the future, according to project proponents.

What these perceived benefits do not account for are the struggling small businesses that need SDG&E to complete its work. This is a consequence all too severe for some businesses and families, making a timely construction process all the more critical to the future and well-being of the Alpine community.

The fact remains that some of our local shops have been forced to close their doors. For many small businesses, already under the burden of high taxes, government over-regulation and growing uncertainty, the added obstacles of limited street access and lack of parking for customers is pushing some Alpine businesses to the brink. SDG&E, on the other hand, does not have these worries. Its continued operation is not based on customers conveniently visiting offices in downtown San Diego or San Clemente, where people can take care of business and then leave without any difficulty or hassle. SDG&E customers can usually conduct their matters online or have their concerns addressed by a phone call.

Businesses on Alpine Boulevard do not have the same privilege. Unlike SDG&E, they are entirely dependent upon the loyalty of customers and the support of a community that values quality service and convenience. SDG&E's most recent attempt to seek longer work hours is a step in the right direction but how the construction process is put into motion will be the true measure of commitment.

The Sunrise Powerlink underwent much public debate and a large segment of the community remains unconvinced of the project's merit and necessity. Count me among the skeptics. But, even so, SDG&E has an obligation to us all – and, of course, itself -- to get the job done without delay and as little impact as possible.