



Caroline Wozniak: Interview with the FERC Pandemic Liaison

Mary O’Driscoll: Welcome to Open Access, I’m Mary O’Driscoll. On March 19, FERC Chairman Neil Chatterjee named Caroline Wozniak as FERC’s Pandemic Liaison in response to the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis.

Caroline leads a team of 14 FERC staffers from the Commission’s 12 program offices to respond quickly to industry inquiries related to impacts of COVID-19 to their FERC jurisdictional activities.

Welcome to Open Access, Caroline.

Caroline Wozniak: Thanks! I’m happy to be here!

Mary O’Driscoll: Tell us a little bit about you. How long have you worked at FERC?

Caroline Wozniak: First, let me say that I am thankful to Chairman Chatterjee for the opportunity to serve in this role. I joined FERC in 2008 as an analyst in the Office of Energy Policy and Innovation. Currently, I am a Senior Policy Advisor in FERC’s Office of Energy Market Regulation. I advise the Commission on matters involving energy markets, tariffs and rates relating to electric, natural gas and oil pipeline facilities and services. Prior to my current role I served as an advisor to former FERC Chairman Norman C. Bay.

Mary O’Driscoll: Why did the chairman establish the position of Pandemic Liaison? What is your role?

Caroline Wozniak: As you know, the President declared a national emergency on March 13 concerning COVID-19, and the Commission’s response was immediate. Chairman Chatterjee has emphasized that ensuring the reliability and security of our nation’s vital energy infrastructure is critical and is the Commission’s top priority.

As part of a suite of actions, the Chairman created the Pandemic Liaison position to serve as a single point of contact so that FERC’s regulated entities would know where to go to ask questions and receive guidance during this unusual time.

My team and I immediately review the questions submitted and work with the appropriate Commission staff to respond as quickly and comprehensively as possible. We also keep the Chairman and his team apprised of industry’s needs during this time. I really appreciate the expertise and collaboration across my team and the subject matter experts on staff!

Mary O'Driscoll: If the industry has questions, how do they get in touch with you?

Caroline Wozniak: Members of FERC's regulated community can email PandemicLiaison@ferc.gov.

Mary O'Driscoll: How long does it take for you and your team to respond to these inquiries?

Caroline Wozniak: We try to respond within one to two business days, if not the same day.

Mary O'Driscoll: What types of inquiries are you and the team receiving? Can you give us an example?

Caroline Wozniak: The Pandemic Liaison team has received over 70 email inquiries through the public mailbox.

As Chairman Chatterjee highlighted in his recent podcast, the Commission has taken a number of actions in response to the Coronavirus. This includes extending deadlines for certain required filings. So, we've received many questions from entities seeking clarity about whether the deadlines for their specific filings have been automatically extended or whether they need to request an extension. That's probably the largest category of questions we receive.

Mary O'Driscoll: What other kinds of questions are you getting?

Caroline Wozniak: We've also received a number of questions about filings that require a sworn declaration or original signature. Given the pandemic, entities have expressed concern that it would be unduly burdensome to obtain signatures for such a declaration.

Mary O'Driscoll: So, what's the Commission doing?

Caroline Wozniak: The Commission has taken action to waive requirements that certain filings with the Commission be supported by a sworn declaration and requirements to provide or obtain notarized documents.

Mary O'Driscoll: What other types of questions are you getting?

Caroline Wozniak: In addition, we received a question about the Commission's April 2 Policy Statement, specifically: what industries the Policy Statement applies to and which costs the Commission envisioned for potential recovery.

Mary O'Driscoll: And what's the Commission doing there?

Caroline Wozniak: The Policy Statement was intended to be broadly applicable to all Commission-regulated industries. The Policy Statement anticipates that regulated entities may incur costs necessary to assure the business continuity of their infrastructure in response to the national emergency. The Policy Statement intentionally did not specify the types of costs that an entity may seek to recover under the Policy Statement as the Commission did not want to unduly limit the costs that may be considered consistent with the Policy Statement.

Mary O'Driscoll: Anything else?

Caroline Wozniak: We've also received questions about whether the Commission is continuing to accept hard copy submissions.

Mary O'Driscoll: Are we?

Caroline Wozniak: While we are continuing to accept hard copy submissions, it is our preference, before and after Coronavirus, to receive submissions electronically via eFiling. The building is closed to the public, and FERC is not allowing couriers or other hand deliveries at this time, so all mail and packages must be sent via a commercial mail or delivery service.

Mary O'Driscoll: How are you getting the word out that this service is available to the regulated industries?

Caroline Wozniak: Chairman Chatterjee has committed to work closely with our federal, state and industry partners during this crisis. To that end, I recently participated in conference calls with the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, the National Association of State Energy Officials, the National Governors Association and the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates.

These calls provide FERC's state partners with updates on FERC's efforts and the Commission actions since the COVID-19 pandemic forced most of the country into a telework status in early March.

The Commission has also established a Coronavirus webpage at www.ferc.gov to keep everyone informed about actions the Commission is taking, and it's updated frequently with announcements, news releases and Commission orders and notices related to operations and regulations during the pandemic.

And, of course, the Chairman is good at getting the word out, too.

Mary O’Driscoll: Oh yes, he is! Thanks for being with us today, Caroline. And to you, your family and to all our listeners, please stay safe and healthy.

Craig Cano: FERC is an independent regulatory agency that oversees the interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas and oil. FERC reviews proposals to construct and operate interstate natural gas pipelines and liquefied natural gas terminals and oversees the licensing of nonfederal hydropower projects. FERC protects the reliability of the high-voltage interstate transmission system through mandatory reliability standards, and it monitors interstate energy markets to ensure that everyone in those markets is playing by the rules. Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in these podcasts are personal views and do not necessarily express the views of individual Commissioners or the Commission as a whole. This podcast is a production of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s Office of External Affairs. We will be updating our posts when we’ve got more news, so be sure to check out our website, www.ferc.gov, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to find out when our next podcast airs.