



FERC Podcast Transcript  
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## Interview with Commissioner Robert Powelson

**Craig Cano:** Welcome to FERC's Open Access podcast series, I'm Craig Cano. Our guest today is Commissioner Robert Powelson who was confirmed by the Senate on August 4 to a term that ends in June 2020.

Commissioner, welcome to the podcast.

**Commissioner Robert Powelson:** Craig great to be with you.

**Craig Cano:** It's been a week since you were sworn in. How are you settling in?

**Robert Powelson:** Well I must say the first week was certainly drinking from the fire hose, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow FERC-ians for their warm outreach and hospitality and professionalism in kind of getting me grounded in some of the FERC protocols and getting me up to speed on some of the pressing issues. And I'm proud to report within a week's time, we've gotten some orders out the door. So FERC, as I like to say, is back in business.

**Craig Cano:** You mentioned the workload and that progress is being made, how are you doing with it overall?

**Robert Powelson:** Well I certainly think it's a work in progress. I will say I think in terms of priorities working with Chairman Chatterjee and Commissioner LaFleur, who I've worked with – and let me just say we owe her a debt of a gratitude for her leadership. She someone I've worked with as a state Commissioner for my nine years in Pennsylvania. She is someone who cares very deeply about the state government relations and the state public utility commissions, and I'm honored to serve with her. In terms of this whole issue of the backlog and realizing we haven't had a quorum since February, I think there's no more pressing issue to demonstrate to the publics that we regulate and consumers across America that we are doing our work and working with our professional staff here at the FERC to get these orders out the door. I like to tell people over 1,500 cases per year come through the FERC with close to \$500 billion of infrastructure spend, so a lot of these projects have been on hold, a lot of these projects have gone through tremendous rigor and review processes. And now with the quorum restored were getting back up and running and making decisions around some of these big infrastructure cases right now.

**Craig Cano:** Can you tell us a little bit about what your priorities as a Commissioner will be.

**Robert Powelson:** I think first and foremost a lot of my priorities are shaped in my nine

years in Pennsylvania and serving as chairman of the commission -- one of the larger commissions in the country – and, more recently, my experience as the president of NARUC. So priorities for me really start with the work that's already being done in our Office of Energy Infrastructure Security with Joe McClelland, who basically had adopted Pennsylvania for some cyber training. I think cybersecurity is going to be a pressing issue not only for states, but the work that were doing with our cohorts in the federal government. So cybersecurity is going to be a pressing issue.

You heard me mention earlier this whole issue of infrastructure and how do we grapple with the need to get natural resources whether they're hydro, they're natural gas related, or oil pipelines. Getting infrastructure sited and doing it with the steadfast commitment to the environmental compact. And electric and gas safety and reliability are so critically important to that as well. So I think the FERC will certainly not be lacking issues. I am excited by the challenge that lies ahead, and more importantly I think that it's a great opportunity to really showcase the Pennsylvania experience, which is one that I'm very proud of when we talk about things like cybersecurity, electric and gas safety. This is something that's kind of embedded in my DNA as I approach some of these cases that lie in front of me.

**Craig Cano:** As you mentioned you were state regulator at the Pennsylvania commission for almost a decade. How will that experience inform your work here at FERC, and do you expect things to be different?

**Robert Powelson:** That's a great question. I start with the fact that, and I said this my first week into the job, a lot of the apparatus here, believe it or not, is very similar to my role back in Pennsylvania. Looking at things like setting ROEs, citing infrastructure; dealing with things like electric and gas safety, cybersecurity. These are all issues that I'd been versed in in working with my colleagues back in Pennsylvania on but obviously, as I like to remind people, I'm coming from the minor leagues, if I can use a baseball analogy, as a suffering Philadelphia Phillies fan. I'm coming from the minor leagues, or the bottom of the NL East here, and this is the major leagues. In these projects, as I mentioned earlier, this agency touches about \$500 billion of infrastructure spending.

But as I approach my decision-making in working with our key leadership here is again looking at things like need, looking at local community inputs, looking at safety. These are all things that are kind of ingrained in my DNA and when I make a decision around a piece of infrastructure or set an ROE or look at a tariff infrastructure. Or, by the way, we do – both my former agency and this agency – have an investigation and enforcement unit. And that's a critically important function because we have to have functioning markets and we have to, as I like to say back in Pennsylvania, you can drive 80 on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, that's why we have state troopers. So the work that's being done here on enforcement is so critically important to the markets.

**Craig Cano:** As part of your work in the states, you spent the last almost a year, I think as chairman of NARUC – I'm sorry, as President of NARUC.

**Robert Powelson:** I'll take that promotion, by the way.

**Craig Cano:** Could you tell us a little bit about your view of the relationship between FERC and the state commissions.

**Robert Powelson:** Well it is one embedded in a lot of good history. A strong working relationship. I think if you look back over the history of FERC commissioners, Commissioner Honorable, Commissioner Clark, Chairman Wood these are all individuals that have served this agency with distinction in one leadership role or another, and it all started with their state experience. So the work that NARUC does with the FERC, I'll use the example of electric/gas coordination, cybersecurity. These are all issues that the NARUC state leadership is looking for a collaborative working relationship with the FERC.

I go back to the work that Chairman LaFleur, Chairman Bay, Chairman Wellinghoff these are all individuals that did that outreach, how important it is. Because state regulators don't like top-down approaches from Washington. They want to listen to what's going on inside the Beltway, but as I like to remind people there a lot of innovative things happening in state capitals and we have to be respectful of that. We have to be cognizant of states' rights. But we also, to our side of the ledger, we have a legal compact and that's the Federal Power Act and Natural Gas Act, and applying rule of law questions to those big issues is critically important.

So I think the dialogue is so important. Continuing it, being active at NARUC conferences. We used to do things like the old Sunday morning FERC church sessions. We had the Chairman of the FERC at our meetings and many of the Commissioners participate in a number of the different panel discussions. That's all going to continue with the new leadership here, and I think it's good for that outreach to state PUCs to have access to the FERC technical staff and FERC Commissioners.

**Craig Cano:** Commissioner Powelson we appreciate your time. Thank you very much for stopping by Open Access.

**Robert Powelson:** Craig, it's great to be with you and I look forward to working with you here over the next few years. Thank you.

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