

Chairman Glick says farewell to FERC

And he discusses everything from the transmission agenda he teed up to what most people might not know about him.

Recorded December 28, 2022

Mary O'Driscoll: Welcome to Open Access. I'm Mary O'Driscoll. Today our honored guest is Chairman Rich Glick, who will be leaving FERC in January after five years at the Commission – the last two years of which were very busy ones as Chairman. Chairman – Rich – it's really great to have you here.

Chairman Glick: Thanks, Mary. It's good to be back.

Mary O'Driscoll: First off, I just wanted to know, looking back, what stands out to you about the Commission from your time as both Commissioner and Chair of the Commission?

Chairman Glick: Well, at the top of the list it's definitely the Commission's staff. Their expertise, their dedication, their work ethic – I said this at the last Commission meeting and I really meant it: It's like having a front row seat at the best education you get on energy topics of the day, and I very much cherished it.

But also I think another thing I think that stands out to me is just there hasn't been one boring day at FERC, and I've been at FERC now a little over five years. It's just, the issues are so interesting, the cases that come up on a daily basis, like I said, there's just not a boring day. This country is in the midst of a dramatic transition in the way we produce, consume and transport energy. And the Commission's in the middle of everything. Much of what we do on a daily basis has very much of an impact on the transition that's under way across this country. And the decisions the Commission makes impact many millions of people each day. And I know I take that responsibility very seriously and I know my colleagues do as well.

Mary O'Driscoll: OK. You're leaving the Commission at a time when you've teed up a heavy transmission agenda for action. Do you think the Commission will be able to act on those matters?

Chairman Glick: I do. You know, the country, as I mentioned before, we're in a midst of a very dramatic transition in the way we produce, consume and transport energy, and everyone knows we need a significant amount of more interstate transmission for the grid – not just because we need to access more remotely located renewable resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but even more so, the reliability of the grid depends on it. In addition to that, consumers need better access to cheaper sources of power, and building out

the grid is going to do that.

Now the Commission, as everyone knows, the Commission has embarked on a number of reforms related to transmission planning, cost allocation and interconnection of generators to the grid. But in addition to that, there is a number of other issues I think the Commission is going to have to grapple with, one of which is transmission cost containment, one of which is interregional transmission capacity – how do we add more transmission capacity between regions – certainly even on incentives, the way we incentivize transmission today. All those things, the Commission needs to take a look at. And I'm confident it's going to get done in large part because it has to get done.

Mary O'Driscoll: Well, let's go back to when you first started at the Commission in 2017. What is the one thing you wish you knew at the time?

Chairman Glick: You know, in hindsight when I think about it, there's a lot of things I wish I knew. But in hindsight, but the one thing that sticks out to me most is, and I mentioned this a few minutes ago, how important staff are and, and really the need to take advantage of the staff's expertise. When I first got here, I remember there was a 200-page memo sitting on my chair and I read it well into the night. I read that, it was a very important issue, it had to do with the Department of Energy's proposed NOPR at the time. And we spent a lot of time thinking about it, talking about it in our office. But, and then you get one order after another, and you try to go through as much as you can, it's very time-consuming. And I didn't really take the time at first to sit down with staff, Commission staff in the various program offices, to gather their expertise and hear from them on how they saw the various issues. I wish I had done more of that at the beginning. I actually tried to take advantage of that more frequently, but it took awhile for me to get up to speed on that.

Mary O'Driscoll: Are there any lessons you've learned during your time as Chairman and Commissioner that are worth passing along? And,...

Chairman Glick: Sure,...

Mary O'Driscoll: OK, that's the first part of the question, so I'll let you answer that.

Chairman Glick: OK Mary, I apologize for jumping the gun there.

Mary O'Driscoll: Oh, not a problem.

Chairman Glick: First of all, and I know I'm going to be a broken record on this but first of all, I'd say to the other Commissioners, take advantage of the terrific staff that are out there, as I just mentioned. It's very important to do that.

Secondly, and I said something about this at the Commission meeting last, uh, recently, in December, and that is: It's very important to have communications between Commissioners. Ever since I got to FERC, it was common practice to have a call either every week or every other week, with each of the Commissioners. I say call now, but before Covid times, we did it in person, in-person meetings. Very important, to have that line of communication. And sometimes, Commissioners are going to have strong feelings about an issue, but it helps for Commissioners to find common ground, to be able to have those discussions.

And you know the last piece of advice that I'd have, a lesson worth passing on is, compromise isn't a dirty word. You know we spend a lot of time trying to compromise, sometimes successfully, sometimes not successfully, and where I wasn't able to compromise, I certainly let people know my views. But the way the Commission is structured, there's five Commissioners, and it doesn't work without compromise. And so, I think it's always important to keep that in mind.

Mary O'Driscoll: OK, well then looking back, what stands out to you about the Commission from your time both as Commissioner and Chair?

Chairman Glick: Well, you know, I think that it is that FERC is not the sleepy agency that people used to describe it as. We're in the middle of a dramatic transformation, a lot of it related to climate change, a lot of it is related to the goals that utilities have set, that consumers want their utilities to set, that states have set and that the federal government has set, in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

And FERC isn't an environmental agency – we're far from it. But the decisions we make have profound impacts on the decisions made by others in trying to reduce those greenhouse gas emissions. And, I think the Commission's going to be at the forefront of those issues for many years to come.

Mary O'Driscoll: Okay well for those of us who are old enough to remember, Here's the Barbara Walters question: What is one surprising thing about you that the FERC insiders would never know but should?

Chairman Glick: I thought Barbara Walters asked, if you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be.

Mary O'Driscoll: Well, that was next, but OK.

Chairman Glick: You know, I think, by now, people probably know a lot about me, at least the ones that follow FERC. But I would say people might be surprised to learn that I like to listen to punk music.

Mary O'Driscoll: I did not see that coming. Okay what's your favorite band?

Chairman Glick: I think Social Distortion probably is probably what I was listened to most.

Mary O'Driscoll: I love it. That's great. See, you made me speechless. Awesome.

Chairman Glick: I can do that, on occasion.

Mary O'Driscoll: What is your most favorite and least favorite memory of your time at the Commission?

Chairman Glick: Well, if I can start with least favorite, and I mentioned this a bit at the last Commission meeting, I can pinpoint the day as January 2, 2019, when Chairman McIntyre passed away after a long battle with cancer. It was just the darkest day in FERC history and I think it will always be. I always think, can't help but thinking back to what the Commission would be like if Chairman McIntyre had been healthy and able to serve as Chair during the entire Trump administration. I think FERC would have been much different.

In terms of a positive memory, it's really hard to pin down one specific memory. I'm always going to remember fondly the bonding and, yes, even some of the fun, my advisors and I had working on some very difficult issues when I first came to the Commission. You know, when you're not Chair, you have more leeway to embrace the outcomes that you believe are right. And if you feel strongly about something, you say it. And I certainly took advantage of that with a number of dissents and concurrences, especially my first several years at the Commission. And I made sure people knew where I stood. And even though a lot of it's hard work and a lot of it's frustrating at times, I remember the camaraderie of the advisors in my office and myself when we put together those dissents and concurrences. And looking back on it, it was actually fun times, often fun.

Mary O'Driscoll: OK. Crystal ball time: Let's say you come back to the Commission for a visit in 20 years. What kinds of issues do you think the Commission will be grappling with then?

Chairman Glick: Well, I bet that everyone that's answered this question in the past has gotten it way wrong. It's almost impossible to predict what the situation is going to be like in

20 years. Think back in 2002, 20 years ago, if you'd asked that question of the outgoing – well I don't know if there was an outgoing chair or any of the commissioners at the time – no one would have even come close to even hitting the mark with what the situation looks like today. Technological innovations that have occurred, just even in the last 10 years really, that have made wind and solar, especially solar, much more cost competitive and much more available to folks and those technological innovations are undoubtedly going to continue to occur. And it's almost impossible to envision if it's going to be, you know, fusion – we've seen some great announcements recently about some dramatic advancements in fusion technology. Is it going to be another source of generation, is it going to be these small modular nuclear reactors? Is it going to be more solar and wind? It's very hard to figure out where we're going to be in 20 years. But I would say, I think the one thing I'm pretty confident in is that we're going to be dealing with the consequences of climate change even more so than we're dealing with it today, in terms of extreme weather, the kind of impact that might have on grid reliability. I think the Commission's going to be dealing with that for some time to come.

Mary O'Driscoll: All right, well, final question. You have regularly said that FERC staff is the best thing about this agency. What parting words do you want to share with staff and words of wisdom as they enter into this next transition?

Chairman Glick: I've always thought it's got to be very difficult for staff when there's a change in chairmanships. You know, especially when the change coincides with a new president, as you might have a Commissioner, a Chair, wanting to pursue a particular agenda, pursuing different issues in a certain way, then all of a sudden you have a different chair that might want to view those issues differently or may want to pursue a whole different agenda. And I can't imagine how difficult it is for staff to be working hard on something and then to find out that the thing they're working hard on, they're moving in a different direction.

But I'd say, the one piece of advice I would give to staff – and I think they tend to do this anyway, we have by far and away the most professional staff that I've ever come across in the executive branch – is always, the advice I would give is, always do and advocate for what you think is right. Whether it's from a legal perspective, an engineering perspective, or even economic policy, it's the expertise that's staff's expertise that we Commissioners rely on, on a daily basis. I'd rather hear what someone thinks rather than what they think that I want them to think. And I think that's true of the other Commissioners as well. So that would be my parting advice I would give to them.

Mary O'Driscoll: OK. Well, Rich, it's been great serving with you here at FERC. Thanks so much for joining us today on Open Access. Our best wishes to you as you embark on your next chapter.

Chairman Glick: Thank you so much, Mary.

FERC is an independent regulatory agency that oversees the interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas and oil, 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 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.