

May 2009

NomineeAlert



Wellinghoff's Background

Commissioner, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Staff Counsel, Nevada Public Utilities Commission

Associate Professor of Environmental Law, UNLV

Energy law, Beckley Singleton, Las Vegas, NV

Consumer Advocate of the State of Nevada

Staff Attorney, Consumer Committee, U.S. Senate Commerce Committee

Staff Attorney, Federal Trade Commission

Deputy District Attorney, Washoe County, Nevada

Legal Assistant, Nevada Public Service Commission

EDUCATION

B.S., University of Nevada at Reno

M.A.T., Howard University

J.D., Antioch School of Law

this issue:

Jon Wellinghoff, Nominee to be Chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Who is Jon Wellinghoff?

On March 19, 2009 President Obama announced Jon Wellinghoff as his nominee to be Chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Wellinghoff currently serves as a member of the Commission.

Wellinghoff recently told reporters that he did not see the United States needing any new coal or nuclear power plants. "We may not need any, ever." Another time he even went so far as to say, "I think [nuclear expansion] is kind of a theoretical question. Because I don't see anybody building these things, I don't see anybody having one under construction." He claims that "renewables like wind, solar and biomass will provide enough energy to meet baseload capacity and future energy demands" and "baseload capacity will become an anachronism...ultimately wind is going to be the cheapest thing to do." He also holds that "we can reduce our energy usage in this country by 50 percent." According to the New York Times,

No Nukes....

"Wellinghoff's view[s] [also] go[es] beyond the consensus outlook in the electric power industry about future sources of electricity." They struck

"We may not need any, [new nuclear or coal power plants] ever." "We can reduce our energy usage in this country by 50 percent."

- Jon Wellinghoff

"The only way to reduce our energy usage by 50 percent is to reduce the population by half. Claiming that we can have this reduction in any other way ignores reality."

- Bill Wilson, President, Americans for Limited Government

Jerry Taylor, Cato's energy expert as "crazy." To Taylor these ideas "betray a lack of knowledge about the electricity market [and] a lack of appreciation for the energy market as a whole. We hear over-the-top claims and statements about renewable energy on a near-daily basis, so I don't take his comments particularly seriously." Jay Apt from Carnegie Mellon's Electricity Industry Center seems to agree: "I don't think we're

where Chairman Wellinghoff would like us to be. You need firm power to fill in when the wind doesn't blow. There is just no getting around that. Interacting widely scattered wind farms cannot provide smooth power." Even Revis James of the Electric Power Research Institute, whose Green Transmission Efficiency initiative is co-chaired by Wellinghoff, says "it is not clear how fast renewable

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Sources for further reading:

Fn.1. Noel Straub and Peter Behr, *Energy Regulatory Chief Says New Coal, Nuclear Power Plants May be Unnecessary*, GREENWIRE, April 22, 2009. Available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2009/04/22/22greenwire-no-need-to-build-new-us-coal-or-nuclear-plants-10630.html>. (Accessed May 11, 2009.)

Noel Straub, *FERC chairman sees himself leading U.S. march toward energy efficiency*, GREENWIRE, April 22, 2009. Available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2009/04/27/27greenwire-ferc-chairman-sees-himself-leading-us-march-to-10686.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed April 11, 2009.)

Fn.2. John G. Edwards, *Nevadan At Work Column*, LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL, May 6, 2001. Available online at: http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2001/May-06-Sun-2001/business/15926087.html. (Accessed May 11, 2009.)

Christopher Joyce, *Building Power Lines Creates a Web of Problems*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO, Morning Edition, April 28, 2009. Available online at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=103537250>. (Accessed May 11, 2009.)

Fn.3. *Energy Regulatory Chief Says New Coal, Nuclear Plants May Be Unnecessary*, *supra*.

About Us, Silver Springs Networks, Available online at: http://www.silverspringnetworks.com/about_us/. (Accessed May 11, 2009.)

Andy Stone, *Smart Grid, Stupid Policy?*, FORBES.COM. Available online at: http://www.forbes.com/2009/01/29/electricity-infrastructure-obama-business-energy-0129_smart_grid.html. (Accessed May 11, 2009.)

What you really need to know about Wellinghoff

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energy can be added without creating reliability issues.” James sums the situation up rather well when he observes, “On the policymakers’ side, there’s a lot that is still not understood about the implications of a large share of renewables.” Fn.1.

Wellinghoff has no qualms about using government power to accomplish his goals. In a 2001 interview he said, “So we’re not seeing renewables being developed but they should be, just like we needed to have the federal government step in and start building dams (for hydroelectric power) 60 years ago. [...] We need to have the state government step in and say ‘Utilities, this percentage of your total load should be renewables.’” And as Nevada’s Consumer Advocate he “drafted legislation that requires Nevada Power Co. and Sierra Pacific Power Co. to buy increasing portions of their electrical supply from so-called renewable resources.” According to a April 28, 2009 report from National Public Radio he “hopes he’ll soon have the authority to overrule states,” if they try to block power lines necessary to transport power from remote renewable energy sources to more populated areas. By a recent federal court ruling the FERC no longer has that power, but it is already being provided for in the upcoming energy bill. As Wellinghoff says, “at the end of the day you need the power to overrule [the states].” That way “we get the upgrades done that are essential to the national interest, national security and our environmental interest with respect to carbon and greenhouse emissions.” Fn.2.

With a Name Like “Smart” it Has to Be Good...

Wellinghoff pins this hope in renewable energy technology on the successful implementation of a new power infrastructure called “smart grid,” which involves installing so-called “smart” meters in every house, which would allow both consumers and suppliers to measure individual demand in more detail. It would also allow suppliers to more closely manage power output and offer a tiered pricing system for using electricity during peak and off-peak hours. And it is a sine qua non for the inclusion of renewables in the grid: “We are going to have to go to a smart grid to get to this point I’m talking about,” says Wellinghoff. “But if we don’t go to that digital grid, we’re not going to be able to move these renewables, anyway. So it’s all going to be an integral part of operating that grid efficiently.” But what no one is saying about the “smart grid” is that no one is sure if it works the way it is supposed to work. Michael Jung, policy director At Silver Springs Network says, “No one has ever looked at a smart grid project built to scale. We don’t know what all the eventual applications running on the smart grid will be, and thus we don’t know how to quantify their costs and benefits.” Fn.3.

Wellinghoff also pushes plug-in electric cars which some say can end up “serving as storage devices for utility companies.” “He is a proponent of using electric cars to send electricity back to the electrical grid as well as draw from it. Electric-car owners could sign up with a company that would amalgamate hundreds or thousands of car owners and, based on their average behavior, promise to either draw down or send back electricity to the grid. Car owners would be paid, which would help offset the cost of electric vehicles, currently priced at least \$8,000 or as much as \$12,000 more than non-electric versions.” Fn.4.

Wellinghoff was the first consumer advocate of the State of Nevada, and himself admits that he wrote the legislation that created the office, “As a volunteer, I actually wrote the 1981 bill that created the Office of Consumer Advocate.” See *John G. Edwards, Fn.2.*

Fn.4. Steven Mufson, *Climate Change “Big Priority For Energy Chief*, THE WASHINGTON POST, March 21, 2009, at A03. Available online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/20/AR2009032003194.html>. (Accessed May 11, 2009.)

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