

Q&A: Meet House Republicans' freshman grid guru

North Dakota Rep. Julie Fedorchak is bringing her lengthy experience at North Dakota's energy regulator to the Energy and Commerce Committee.

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E&E DAILY | Republican freshman Rep. Julie Fedorchak is

gaining a lot of power in Republican's energy and environment plans in the very beginning of her first term. It's probably for a good reason.

That's because the North Dakota lawmaker may be, on arrival, the most experienced on energy issues on Capitol Hill. For 12 years, she led North Dakota's Public Service Commission, overseeing electric utilities, natural gas pipelines and more, and was the president of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners until late last year.

Republican energy leadership noticed her energy chops quickly. This month, she was awarded with a unique opportunity to serve on the House Energy and Commerce Committee as a freshman, giving her a powerful voice on energy and grid issues.

Her move to Energy and Commerce was aided by Sen. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.), who took the same path as Fedorchak from North Dakota's PSC to the House in 2013. He told Republican leadership there's not one lawmaker in the House who can rival Fedorchak's experience and voice.

"The pitch I made to leadership is that you will not have anybody out of the 434 other members who will know as much as she does," Cramer said. "She'll be able to tell you everything on day one, particularly regarding issues related

to FERC, utilities and electricity policy."

Fedorchak isn't resting on her laurels. In her first week on Capitol Hill, she [penned a letter](#) to then-President-elect Donald Trump and Interior Secretary nominee Doug Burgum listing the top 20 federal regulations she believes are crippling the nation's energy industry.

Environment and climate advocates, however, aren't likely to be a fan of her recommendations. She wants to get rid of climate regulations like EPA's rule on power plant emissions and its rule to limit methane emissions from natural gas producers, and is a staunch defender of states' authorities to plan grid infrastructure despite Democratic efforts to federalize the process.

"I think that those regional entities, a lot of them, have processes in place to work through [permitting issues]," Fedorchak said. "I don't know that the federal government needs to intervene and provide any all-encompassing solution."

Fedorchak does, however, support an "all-of-the-above" energy philosophy, saying renewables should compete in a fair market with other baseload energy sources. She's also a grid expert, potentially providing an important voice in bipartisan discussions to overhaul regulations on energy infrastructure.

The North Dakota lawmaker talked about permitting reform, her priorities for Energy and Commerce, and more in a sit-down with POLITICO'S E&E News:

It's quite an honor to be selected to Energy and Commerce in your first term. What's your plan to take advantage of that?

I think regulatory reform is one of the key issues and first things out of the gate that I feel like we can make a difference on. It's something that President Trump is able to take action on, hopefully on a lot of it, along with my former colleague and governor of North Dakota, Doug Burgum.

We've already sent a letter with our top 20 regulations that we hope that they will get aggressive and turn back. And we're also reviewing to see which of those might be something that we can tackle through the Congressional Review Act, and which aren't.

Related to that, my most immediate concerns are with the reliability of the grid. Few people realize how fragile that is today. I think we have incredible opportunities to increase energy production, whether its oil and gas or new technologies that we can invest in. We need to address all of the needs, including reliability, affordability and sustainability.

Permitting reform is a big issue in Congress, but

lawmakers have generally failed to come together on a comprehensive legislative package. As someone who's had direct experience permitting energy infrastructure, where do you stand in the debate?

In my time on the [North Dakota PSC], we permitted \$15 billion ... of energy projects. So I've spent hundreds of hours in permitting hearings. I was one of two who approved the Dakota Access pipeline and spent dozens of hours in hearings on that and all the aftermath.

None of the permits that I was involved with have been challenged in court. That speaks to some of the good things about our process that leads me to believe that states are better at permitting than the federal government. So I think that states are the best answer for permitting challenges.

At the same time, there are big problems in the Northeast as it relates to pipelines. The Northeast needs more natural gas, and states like New York won't let pipes through their state. So those are trickier issues where there's a natural, perhaps federal, interest in those, and so I'm excited to work on those issues.

It's a big problem, so I'm looking forward to working with Rep. [Bruce] Westerman [R-Ark.] on some of the things that he's brought forward with [National Environmental Policy Act] reform. The legal battles are endless and the costs are

mounting for every project. So we have to figure out how to put some parameters on that. I like the idea of a shot clock, but you're gonna have to have some teeth in it so that it's actually enforceable.

Democrats say the federal government should take a larger role in permitting transmission lines, especially those that go through multiple states. Would you be open to working with Democrats on transmission reform?

I'll work with Democrats on a number of these issues, because the one thing I think I've heard loud and clear from industry is they want certainty. Just tell us what the rules are going to be long term, because they're investing in projects that aren't just like a year or two or four years, like the term of a president. They are 30 years. So they have to long term what the environment is going to look like.

I don't know that the federal government needs to intervene and provide any big, all encompassing solution. FERC has definitely taken a higher role there, and I haven't always supported even what FERC is doing in terms of trying to provide sort of common standards for every single region to follow.

In North Dakota, we didn't have a strong mandate for carbon dioxide reductions, unlike my neighbors in Minnesota do.

And so I was a loud voice saying, "You can have your own policy, but you have to pay for it." So if you need these transmission lines to meet your policy goals, you should pay for them, and your citizens should pay for them.

You mentioned sustainability previously, what is your opinion on climate change and how urgent is the need to address it?

I think it's an emissions issue. We emit more carbon dioxide today than we did in the past because we're using more fossil fuels, and so emissions are what we need to address. And I don't deny that the emissions are up. They certainly are. You can see that, but we also are going to be the leaders of solving that problem.

America is our innovation, our investments in new technologies. We're already doing that. And so again, it's all about pace. We need to invest in those technologies that develop them and embrace them and deploy them at the pace that they're available, not with arbitrary deadlines. Because if you do that and have arbitrary deadlines and shut things off prematurely before you have resources ready to replace them, you're going to lose public support big time in a hurry.

Should Republicans repeal parts or all of the Inflation Reduction Act in the reconciliation process?

So philosophically, I think the government has a role to play in investing in and supporting new technology development. When those technologies are off and running and sustainable on their own, then the support should go away.

I think there's some room to look at our current energy policy and back away from some of the programs that have been long used to support technologies that are commercially viable, and while also still investing in some of the newer technologies helping to stimulate the new industries like advanced nuclear.

EV mandates and things in there, I do not think those are appropriate. I think that those sorts of really heavy-handed policies that are driving change that is premature, like when it comes to EVs, we don't have nearly enough power generation to replace our current gas fleet with electric fleet, it just doesn't exist.

So there's so many pieces that need to develop that, you can't just have the government giving people money to buy EVs and requiring the manufacturers to produce them when the demand isn't there to buy them. Those sorts of things are just off.

So I think there's plenty of room to find some savings in the IRA, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on just exactly what those things would be.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.