



# NARUC's Gas Committee

Conversation with New York PSC commissioner  
Diane Burman  
(the gas committee's chair).

And comments by

North Dakota PSC commissioner Julie Fedorchak  
(the gas committee's co-vice chair)

District of Columbia PSC commissioner Greer Johnson Gillis  
(the gas committee's co-vice chair)

Washington UTC commissioner Jay Balasbas  
(the pipeline safety subcommittee's chair)

Illinois Commerce Commission's commissioner Ethan Kimbrel  
(the pipeline safety subcommittee's vice chair)

Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities staff  
Andreas Thanos (the gas staff subcommittee's chair)

Oregon PUC staff Lisa Gorsuch  
(the gas staff subcommittee's vice chair)

New Hampshire PUC staff Randy Knepper  
(the pipeline safety staff subcommittee's chair)

Railroad Commission of Texas staff Kari French  
(the pipeline safety staff subcommittee's co-vice chair)

New York PSC staff Kevin Speicher  
(the staff subcommittee on pipeline safety co-vice chair)



After we interviewed New York State PSC Commissioner Diane Burman about NARUC's Committee on Gas that she chairs, she made a really great suggestion. She and we could ask the other leaders of this vitally important committee to comment on its mission and directions, and their role in it. Awesome, was our reaction naturally, and that's what is herein, immediately following Commissioner Burman's interview.

There's a comment by North Dakota Commissioner Julie Fedorchak and by District of Columbia Commissioner Greer Gillis. Both of them are co-vice Chairs of the Gas Committee. And we have comments by Washington Commissioner Jay Balabas and Illinois Commissioner Ethan Kimbrel. They're the Chair and vice-Chair respectively of the uber-important subcommittee on pipeline safety.

The Gas Committee has two staff subcommittees. One is the staff subcommittee on pipeline safety. I told you pipeline safety is important. Randy Knepper, director at the New Hampshire PUC, chairs this staff subcommittee. Kari French, division director for oversight and safety at the Railroad Commission of Texas, and Kevin Speicher, chief for pipeline safety at the New York PSC, are the vice-Chairs. All three leaders of this staff subcommittee have comments herein.

Then there's the staff subcommittee on gas, which covers everything else, aside from pipeline safety. Andreas Thanos, an occasional author of articles in *Public Utilities Fortnightly*, chairs this staff subcommittee. He's gas policy specialist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. And Lisa Gorsuch, is the vice-Chair, and also emergency preparedness manager at the Oregon PUC. Below you'll find their comments as well.

# Diane Burman

## NARUC Gas Committee Chair

**PUF:** Talk about the NARUC Gas Committee, the teams you have put together, and their critical contributions to the committee.

**Commissioner Diane Burman:** We live in exciting, changing, and challenging times in the energy industry, and it's a crucial time for energy regulators to be involved with natural gas. The Gas Committee over the years has fostered awareness and understanding of the issues affecting the transportation, distribution, and sale of natural gas in a safe, efficient, reliable, economical, and environmentally responsible way.

The Gas Committee deals with critical issues including reliability, pipeline safety, energy efficiency, and the review of appropriate policies to enhance and modernize the natural gas utility infrastructure. We are fostering new technologies such as renewable natural gas, carbon capture, and other technologies related to de-carbonization.

We also look at electricity, natural gas interdependencies, the use of natural gas for electric generation, generators, transportation, liquefied natural gas exports, and much more. Our philosophy is one of collaboration.

The strength of our committee membership comes from our legacy, as well as embracing our existing members, and knowing

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like the energy world, our committee is evolving, and that we will always have new members coming on board as there are new regulators at different Commissions.

The focus is in critically looking at how do we work collaboratively. That means, for me in particular as the Chair, ensuring a very strong team approach. We have a solid committee of gas team leadership that is invested in making sure that we are diverse in terms of geography, as well as in terms of gender and racial diversity.

We are looking at our committee membership and pulling into it folks who may be new, and therefore quiet initially, that we want to help prepare for taking on larger, substantive roles.



## However those issues may be decided at the state regulatory level, we hope we brought thoughtful and educational tools to help in those processes.

We embrace new members, their ideas, strengths, and what they want to accomplish, and want to help them achieve that.

This also means working collaboratively with other committees, which is we try as much as we can to have co-sponsorships of panels and forums. For most of our panel discussions during the NARUC meetings we reach across to other committees to make sure that we are including some of their issues or thoughts that might be appropriate for the panel, and for our focus.

We look at reviewing and working closely with DOE and DOT on matters of critical importance. We're increasingly working with NCSL, the National Conference of State Legislators, to make sure that we are establishing a close working relationship between the legislatures and the regulators.

A lot of our work is devoted to critical education, and ensuring that the committee members come away, whether it's a monthly conference call that we have, or from a committee meeting at

NARUC, with information that they find useful enough to bring back to their states.

We also have opportunities for sharing ideas on critical issues that our membership is dealing with, by looking to see if there are similar issues in other jurisdictions and how the other states are dealing with them; whether there are differences among states. For us, it's a matter of ensuring that we continue to strive to bring value to the committee, which we achieve by incorporating everyone's ideas and inputs.

I am happy with what we have collectively achieved so far, and I look forward to the new year, advancing even more the educational goals of the committee, and increasing professional development and engagement with all of the members.

**PUF:** What issues do you see coming up in the next year?

**Commissioner Burman:** We are looking at some critical issues as they relate to gas infrastructure. How does that fit for each state? How do we go about incorporating important educational information for those states that are interested in decarbonization? How does that work in the regulatory space?

What are new technologies? How do we continue to focus on pipeline safety issues even when looking at the future of gas and how its fit may be changing from the traditional sense of it, and how do we work with helping the states during this

transition, and are there other potential opportunities? Of course, this does not mean that we have the same point of view.

It's important that we truly listen to our members and what their needs and wants are. Whether it's particular speakers or specific issues and delving into them. We listen to make sure that we're not dictating a one size fits all approach. We make sure to bring to the table, a thoughtful process encompassing all ideas and issues – all the pros and cons.

Then, how do people work through some of those challenges? Even if they ultimately don't see eye to eye, we want people to feel comfortable in having a thoughtful discussion. However those issues may be decided at the state regulatory level, we hope we brought thoughtful and educational tools to help in those processes. If Commissioners feel that they acquired some core educational/background information, then that may help them in that decision-making process.

It's also important from a team approach point of view that we truly embrace our strength in ensuring diversity. I am personally focused on understanding that females and minorities are still generally underrepresented in the energy sector, especially at the top. I see that women and minorities are breaking down barriers and they are having a positive impact with their solution-driven, limitless mindset.

Due to that, it's a core issue for me that we make sure we at the committee level have a well-represented membership. Our focus is in making sure that we open up those opportunities; open up those potential mentorships that could be there and foster professional growth and engagement for females and other minorities.

I see it as a continuous process of learning and evolving and we need to be mindfully engaged on this because this is how we can truly connect and grow professionally. Diversity, in general, and diversity of opinion add a lot of value to this process.

We're also engaged in looking outward, trying to ensure that we're capturing what we are doing, so that our knowledge base is not lost when a chair or a leadership team member completes their term of office.

We've worked hard at publishing educational handbooks, whether it's pairing it with other task forces, or committees, or somehow making sure that we are adding crucial tools to the toolkit for people to use in the future.

One of the things that we have very much engaged in is the DOE natural gas infrastructure modernization partnership, or NGIMP, with NARUC. We've been doing this in a cooperative fashion since 2016. We convene state regulators,

federal agencies, and other stakeholders to help learn about emerging technologies that are related to important issues around enhancing infrastructure and pipeline safety.

For example, put forward through NGIMP we sponsored a detailed workshop on renewable natural gas. Thereafter, we produced a formal summary of the RNG workshops to capture some of the thoughts, focus, and key takeaways from the RNG workshop.

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We also published an educational handbook on the sampling of methane emissions, detection technologies, and practices for natural gas distribution infrastructure. This helps ensure that we are providing key educational tools for understanding and managing methane emissions.

It summarizes why methane leaks occur, in the context of the natural gas distribution work in networks, and it also identifies existing and emerging leak detection technologies and practices, and then outlines partnerships with the development of novel tools and facilitates the exchange of information on these new and emerging tools.

We want these handbooks and materials to be useful to regulators so they can stay up to date on innovation, whether it's associated with methane emissions, emissions detection technologies, or best practices for natural gas distribution infrastructure.

In the research and development space we strive to see which opportunities are out there for a path forward in the future of gas and, not just the high levels, but what are the critical technical tools even as it relates to safety that are able to be put into practice? What does that look like and what aspects should regulators think about and engage in for a hands-on process?

One of the other issues that we're interested in doing, and we did an LNG report too, gets back to the committee's legacy. We wanted to look at what had been done and where we should go forward.



Courtesy of NARUC

Group of Commissioners and Staff in September 2018 visiting the offices of Heath and ABB in Andover, Massachusetts to see demonstrations of various Remote Methane Leak Detector offerings and the MobileGuard methane leak detection system developed by Heath with an ABB spectroscopy technique.

In 2009, NARUC published a global liquefied natural gas supply and introduction for Public Utility Commissioners. That explored the supply dimensions of LNG and where it comes from. It had all the factors to make it an important resource for state Commissions to consider.

During that period, LNG discussions were mainly focused on imports. However, by February 2016, the U.S. became an exporter of LNG. There's been a lot of talk about LNG transport as a non-pipes alternative for states. For us it was important not to dictate what regulators should do, but to look at how can we facilitate educational information on LNG.

First, we hosted a discussion at the staff subcommittee level, then we looked at building upon that, and examining/updating the previous research from 2009, and we published an educational report on the state of LNG market in the U.S.

That is an opportunity for regulators to have a NARUC-assisted handbook that gives critical tools that's written for the state regulator and gives an overview of the landscape of LNG.

We are now facilitating updating the compendium on pipeline safety in states. To me, this is a robust, detailed, compendium that provides a lot of critical information on pipeline safety.

We are updating it so that regulators can refer to and understand what's out there in each state, and have engagement, and understand a lot of the critical pipeline safety issues and put it into clear and concise educational information. It helps inform our roadmap on key issues on pipeline safety, especially as we are still waiting and engaged in pipeline reauthorization, and that is critical.

It's helpful for us to look at a lot of these topics, to look at the safety issue, the history, and the overview of future reauthorization. There are several hot important topics on pipeline safety issues.

**PUF:** What's been the most rewarding part of being part of chairing this committee, and what's been the most challenging part of chairing this committee?

**Commissioner Burman:** The most rewarding for me is the committee on gas as a whole has been able to make a substantive difference in giving information to people. We've been able to increase awareness on 811 in particular, and we've been able to drill down on understanding why natural gas has a place in our states.

Each place may be a little different so we work through that in a collaborative way. For me it's been the most important thing that we do, and that we do it in a way that is enabling a positive path forward and building bridges together.

The challenging part is that there is so much to learn. We're learning how to do it in a way that keeps people engaged. Considering the time limitations, we want to make sure that we are not just doing the same old thing, but that we are trying to listen to all the voices.

We want to make sure that all Commissions are represented in a way that gives us a lot of value added, and the takeaways from discussions, workshops, panels or resolutions should be, how do we incorporate what seems to be of interest, to be critically evident, and make sure that we're fostering that into the next project that we may be working on? ○



**North Dakota PSC Commissioner Julie Fedorchak,  
Co-Vice Chair of the NARUC Gas Committee**

The Gas Committee has been a valuable venue for me as a Commissioner in an oil and gas producing state to speak about the challenges and opportunities that exist in this industry, but also to learn about new technologies, to discuss regulatory challenges, to push for stronger safety oversight and to generally work toward the common goal of developing, transporting, and using our nation's gas resources in the safest, most environmentally sound way. This helps our nation become energy independent, improves national security and also provides a clean, reliable, and extremely affordable fuel source for Americans who need gas to heat their homes, power their businesses and industries, and support a good quality of life for their families and communities.

What I appreciate most about working with the Gas Committee and NARUC is that we roll up our sleeves and work on issues. We discuss and seek solutions to the challenges facing our nation's utility sector and rarely if ever digress into divisive political issues or partisan politics.

This is a place where people from vastly different personal and political backgrounds come together and find common ground and meaningful solutions. Leaders like Diane Burman are steadfast in their commitment to this principle and provide a great platform for this important work.

**District of Columbia PSC Commissioner Greer Johnson Gillis, Co-Vice Chair of the NARUC Gas Committee**

I am honored to serve on the Gas Committee under Chairwoman Burman's leadership. She has been welcoming since I first joined the committee and has encouraged me to take an active role. At the Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia, my focus is aging infrastructure, including natural gas pipelines in our city. Thus, I see the replacement of aging infrastructure as a critical focus area for our committee. But I am also aware of recent conversations around the country regarding the prohibition of natural gas infrastructure in new developments and the construction of new natural gas pipelines and the impacts as being a critical focus area. Such prohibitions will affect all of us, including our customers whom we represent. It is an area that we as (state) regulators must address and the Gas Committee is the most appropriate forum in which to do so. I look forward to working with Chairwoman Burman, Co-Vice Chair Fedorchak, and all the members of the Gas Committee in moving these issues forward in the coming year.



**Washington UTC Commissioner Jay Balasbas, Pipeline Safety Subcommittee Chair**

Under the leadership of the Chair of the Committee on Gas, the Subcommittee on Pipeline Safety strives to help Commissioners increase awareness of and help implement best practices for the safe transportation and sale of natural gas. We encourage Commissioners to build their knowledge base through lessons learned from past incidents, understanding current trends in the natural gas industry, and working with our federal partners. We also closely work with our excellent Staff Subcommittee of state pipeline safety officials. It is an honor to chair this subcommittee and I look forward to our work in 2020.



Washington UTC Commissioner Jay Balasbas, Pipeline Safety Subcommittee Chair, with Remote Methane Leak Detector.



**Massachusetts Staff Andreas Thanos, Chair NARUC Staff Subcommittee on Gas, and Oregon PUC Staff Lisa Gorsuch, Vice Chair Staff Subcommittee on Gas**

When we got involved with the Staff Subcommittee on Gas, we both agreed the subcommittee had a dual purpose – to provide support to the Committee on Gas, but also to serve the subcommittee membership, the PUC Staff, in terms of education and communication. We were focused on ensuring the subcommittee structure truly furthered open channels of important communication for Staff.

Unfortunately, with limited resources, many Staff are often not able to travel to the three NARUC Summits (Winter, Summer, Annual). So, we view as critically important the subcommittee's second role – to provide the platform for PUC Staff to not only exchange experiences, but also obtain necessary information when needed. In fact, we try to encourage our colleagues to actively participate – whether it is authoring, editing, or researching for a professional paper or suggesting topics for presentations and discussion. For example, in 2019, three members of the subcommittee co-authored an article that was published, here, at PUF. Moreover, NRRI researchers historically took advantage of the collegial mindset of the subcommittee to access expert information that allowed them to author papers of interest to various Commissions, and that were up to date on the activities of the various states. The essence of the subcommittee is one of a welcoming platform for Staff to learn and grow; it is right here where we all can gather and help each other. Further, the Staff Subcommittee on Gas has collaborated with other NARUC Staff Subcommittees at various NARUC meetings and for conference calls (i.e. Staff Subcommittee on Pipeline Safety, Staff Subcommittee on Critical Infrastructure, Staff Subcommittee on Electricity etc.). This has been beneficial as our topics and issues, many times, overlap, and the broad perspective of the larger diverse group is valuable for all of the participants.

PUC Staff tend to look at the nuts and bolts of what is going on in our respective jurisdictions. This allows us to provide knowledgeable support to the Committee on Gas in regard to topics for discussion and, possibly, speakers. In addition, historically, Subcommittee Staff supported various committee projects by providing the information needed and/or reviewing various committee reports.

As a result of how quickly the energy world is evolving and changing, it has never been more important for us to learn from one another, hopefully avoiding reinventing the wheel or repeating mistakes made by our counterparts in other parts of the country. Communication and collaboration are key. Our goals for the upcoming year are to continue to provide the support to the committee as a whole and to the Staff Subcommittee in particular. Regardless of whether we eventually achieve electrification or continue with some variation of the energy mix we have today, Staff needs to be up-to-date and forward thinking. This can only be achieved by actively talking and listening to each other – something we wholeheartedly intend to continue to encourage throughout the upcoming year.



**Illinois Commerce Commission's Commissioner Ethan Kimbrel, Pipeline Safety Subcommittee's Vice Chair**

I had the wonderful opportunity to work with Commissioners Jay Balasbas and Diane X. Burman and Commission Staff member Andreas Thanos and NARUC Staff member Kiera Zitelman and several gas industry experts to publish an educational handbook on methane emissions detection technologies as part of the DOE-NARUC Natural Gas Infrastructure Modernization Partnership. I am thankful to NARUC President Brandon Presley, NARUC Executive Director Greg White and Chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission Carrie Zalewski for the opportunity and support to join the gas leadership team where I will continue to learn from and work with my peers and the many interested stakeholders in the gas sector to increase Commissioner awareness and promote pipeline safety.





**New Hampshire PUC Staff Randy Knepper, Pipeline Safety Staff Subcommittee Chair**

Chairing the NARUC Staff Subcommittee on Pipeline Safety allows me and other members of the Staff subcommittee the opportunity to maintain continual interaction with Commissioners from all regions of the country and solidifies our position as a valuable resource for keeping Commissioners updated and informed on pipeline safety matters. Commissioners can hear firsthand the challenges and issues commonly faced by Staff. Two items this year we are pursuing are closely monitoring the various Pipeline Safety Reauthorization Act proposals that have been put forth to Congressional committees and finalizing publication of the 3rd edition of our comprehensive Compendium of State Pipeline Safety Initiatives. The latter is a technical resource used by many states when considering and examining rules and regulations that are more stringent than the minimal PHMSA federal regulations.



**Railroad Commission of Texas Staff Kari French, Pipeline Safety Staff Subcommittee Co-Vice Chair**

It is important for all of us across the country to work together on Pipeline Safety requirements and rules to ensure that we all benefit from any new technology and best practices. The Staff Subcommittee on Pipeline Safety affords us this opportunity to meet all involved parties on a regular basis.



**New York PSC Staff Kevin Speicher, Co-Vice Chair Staff Subcommittee on Pipeline Safety**

Being a member of the NARUC Staff Subcommittee on Pipeline Safety allows invaluable interaction with Commissioners and Commission Staff from around the country regarding Pipeline Safety challenges facing all of us – from lessons learned during investigations of incidents and near misses to unique and innovative solutions Commissions across the country use to address issues commonly faced by all. Additionally, membership allows close monitoring of the Pipeline Safety Reauthorization Act proposals, as well as discussion on how proposals contained within them will affect State pipeline safety programs. [PDF](#)