

FERC

Chairman authorized aide's politically charged appearances

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Published: Thursday, September 6, 2018

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Chairman Kevin McIntyre signed off on two controversial public appearances by his chief of staff earlier this year, he told congressional Democrats in a letter released today.

The July interview and August speech stirred controversy because Chief of Staff Anthony Pugliese both criticized Democrats and appeared to share nonpublic information about the agency's work to assist the Department of Energy in identifying "critical" power plants ([Energywire](#), Aug. 9).

In an Aug. 24 [response to queries](#) from top Democrats on House and Senate energy committees, made public today, McIntyre said that he was informed by Pugliese about the radio interview with "Breitbart News Sunday" and speech at an American Nuclear Society conference, and that he authorized both appearances.

"Speeches and remarks by members of the Commission's senior staff are routine and commonplace, and I had no basis for concern with Mr. Pugliese's participation in the interview or speech," McIntyre wrote.

While he largely did not weigh in on the substance of Pugliese's comments, which included jabs at New York's Democratic state government over its pipeline policy, McIntyre did say that FERC "has not discussed the merits of any 'grid resilience' proposal that would seek to prefer one form of generation over another with executive branch officials."

Pugliese said in the August speech that the agency was working with the Pentagon and DOE to identify power plants that are critical to maintaining infrastructure like hospitals and military bases, leading to questions about whether FERC, an independent regulatory agency, was involved in DOE's policy goal of rescuing struggling coal and nuclear plants.

McIntyre said in his letter to the lawmakers that Pugliese does not state the views of FERC, which "speaks exclusively through its orders."

In a statement, Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and Rep. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) zeroed in on what they called "bad faith, partisan attacks" on Democrats. In both appearances, Pugliese bashed "members of the Democratic party" who he said are determined not to let energy infrastructure be built in their states.

"While I appreciate Chairman McIntyre's assurance of FERC's continued independence, I am disappointed that he failed to acknowledge in the least that the partisan comments of ... Pugliese, were wholly inappropriate, unhelpful and distasteful," Pallone said.

"To my knowledge, no other FERC Chief of Staff under either Republican or Democratic Administrations has used that position as a platform for partisan attacks. The Chairman should renounce Mr. Pugliese's petty attacks and ensure that they are never repeated," he continued.