

Media & Stakeholder Relations



NARUC Energy Regulatory Partnership Program

*The Energy Regulatory Commission of the Republic of Macedonia
and*

The Vermont Public Service Board

by

Deena Frankel

Vermont Department of Public Service

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Media relations: Vermont roles

- ❖ As judicial body, PSB has traditionally limited media relations regarding cases to:
 - Press releases summarizing orders in significant cases (e.g., major rate cases, alternative regulation, Vermont Yankee)
 - Background provided to press pointing out specific language to help press understand Board orders
- ❖ As executive branch agency and public advocate, DPS plays a more active role in media
 - Issues press releases on many cases and issues
 - Comments in response to press inquiries
- ❖ In US states with “typical” commission structure, the commission is more likely to interact directly with the media and have its own public information officer



DPS media relations objectives

- ❖ Fulfill public advocacy role of ensuring public is informed
- ❖ Attempt to increase the accuracy of public information about utility issues
- ❖ Facilitate public involvement in utility issues
- ❖ Government accountability: demonstrating results from agency funding
- ❖ Political: promoting successes of administration



Vermont media situation

- ❖ Small market makes it relatively easy to get message out
 - 9 daily newspapers
 - 4 local television stations
 - Many weeklies and radio stations
 - Strong public radio with statewide coverage
- ❖ In-depth state news coverage in some dailies and public radio
- ❖ TV, where majority gets news, can be superficial in its treatment of complex energy issues
- ❖ Extensive network of public access television and Vermont Interactive Television enable public to “attend” hearings without traveling to Montpelier
- ❖ Many people get news from outside the market via cable and internet



Value of cultivating media relationships

- ❖ Establish agency as a source of good information by...
 - Contacting press with stories that will be of interest – agency as a resource to the press
 - Serving as a source of background information to help reporters understand complex energy issues
 - Providing comment on breaking stories
- ❖ Positive result of cultivation can be...
 - Credibility, the benefit of the doubt when controversial stories arise
 - Increasing likelihood of coverage of important stories



Stakeholder group relations

- ❖ Variety of stakeholder groups have a presence in the capital facilitating continuing connections with agency on both legislative and other issues
 - Low income, consumer and environmental groups, e.g.: Legal Aid, AARP, VPIRG, Vermont Natural Resources Council, etc.
 - Utilities: most are represented by lobbyists
 - Environmental: in recent years expanded to include “trade” groups whose business is renewable energy
- ❖ Two-way exchange of information with these groups is fostered by familiarity and continuing professional relationships. There is a limited number of “players.”



Legislative relations

- ❖ PSB and DPS each develops annual legislative priorities.
- ❖ Each agency seeks legislative sponsors for its priority bills.
- ❖ One or two staff people in each agency monitor bills filed by other parties on utility issues and actively pursue passage of our own priorities.
- ❖ Various staff people used as experts in testimony and background work as needed.
- ❖ Board Chair and Commissioner of DPS often called to testimony, particularly in most controversial issues.
- ❖ Most legislation involves extensive behind-the-scenes negotiation and compromise among the many interested parties. Legislative committees often want parties to iron out their differences before passing a bill.



Political interests in energy policy

- ❖ Vermont's divided structure, appointed status of Board members, keep PSB *relatively* insulated from politics.
- ❖ DPS as executive branch agency is somewhat more subject to political pressure: agency head works directly for Governor who is elected every two years
- ❖ For the majority vast majority of issues, expert staff is given relatively high flexibility to do its job without political considerations. Communication is a key to making this work.
- ❖ High profile cases test the line between politics and good policy, but the two are often aligned.