

*Remarks of President Presley for the NARUC-PHMSA COVID 19 Briefing
March 20, 2020*

I am sorry I am unable to be with you personally today but wanted to share my remarks that I planned to give. I am delighted NARUC is a partner with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) for this important briefing today. As every one of us knows, we are in the grips of a serious pandemic that has upended many of our day-to-day lives. This is a challenging time for all of us: layoffs have occurred, schools are closed or contemplating closing, local and national economies are suffering, grocery stores and pharmacies are trying to manage their depleted inventories and individuals have been infected by COVID 19 or dealing with their loved ones who have or may worry they have it.

I am truly focused on my leadership role not only as a State commissioner in Mississippi but as your NARUC President. A state utility regulator's mission is to serve the public interest by assuring the delivery of safe, reliable service at reasonable rates. In the midst of the unprecedented challenges from COVID 19 a regulator's job is even more critically important to help in the continued delivery of these services while taking care of impacted consumers. Essential utility service and its effective regulation are intricately tied to public health and the overall public welfare. We, as state regulators, have always known that but now many others are realizing how connected their need for utility service is to their lives and health. We must step up as Commissioner Burman stated earlier and do our part—and I have been so blessed as your President to see how you, our state commissioners and commission staff, are answering the call to serve.

We at NARUC and at many of our State Commissions have taken several important steps to address many of these challenges. To cite just a few of the examples, they are:

- a. some state commissions placing a temporary moratorium on service disconnections during the pandemic that in some cases like my home state of Mississippi extend to suspending utility shutoffs for 60 days to ALL providers including municipalities who normally wouldn't be under our jurisdiction, I note that this doesn't mean these services are free—but rather suspended for a time period while a consumer is dealing with COVID 19;
- b. figuring out appropriate ways to limit public access at our regulatory meetings and/or hearings and allowing electronic filings in place of in person filings to protect public health but to still ensure the public can still watch and participate as reasonably feasible;
- c. asking FCC to require wireless carriers to lift data caps and drop data overage charges on wireless plans;
- d. asking telecommunication companies to work proactively with communities to ensure that students out of school are not left behind academically; and
- e. asking NRRI, our research arm, to compile relevant information of state commission actions in response to COVID 19 that can be used **now** as a Regulatory Resource Guide to help members have up to date information and **later** as an important resource for evaluating and analyzing avenues of appropriate regulatory actions for updated pandemic planning in light of what we have and will continue to learn from COVID 19. It is clear

from this pandemic that energy and telecommunications are a necessity not a luxury. We must take lessons we are learning from this crisis and fix the issues that still confound us like expansion broadband internet service to get every home connected once and for all.

Today we are continuing our priority educational briefings on the COVID 19 activities related to the services we regulate. Earlier this week we had members of the electricity, gas and water industries brief NARUC members with their plans to adhere to established protocols to ensure the safety of both the public and utility personnel. Now, we have PHMSA leadership with us on this call today to brief us on the relevant pipeline safety sections of the federal regulations and law, PHMSA's current authority and how they are engaged in COVID 19 activities with all interested stakeholders including State Commissions.

Our NARUC partnership with PHMSA has never been stronger—we are the state and federal regulators that must help to lead the way on critical pipeline safety matters and to do so we need to figure out ways to effectively and appropriately collaborate and work together. This briefing is one such avenue to do so.

It is important to note that NARUC members have historically served on all of the PHMSA Advisory Committees mandated by law:

- a. Gas Pipeline Advisory Committee (GPAC) Currently (Commissioner Danner serves as chair of GPAC, Commissioner Burman serves as Vice Chair and Ohio Commission Staffer Peter Chase serves as a member of GPAC);
- b. the Liquid Pipeline Advisory Committee (LPAC) (We have traditionally always had one or two commissioners on LPAC, Currently there are commissioner/government vacancies but I have formally submitted to PHMSA two names that I would like for consideration to fill those vacancies, and I am hopeful we will see those vacancies filled soon); and lastly,
- c. The Voluntary Information-Sharing System (VIS) Working Group which was part of the mandates under the Safe Pipes Act of 2016. This group successfully submitted important pipeline safety recommendations to US DOT Secretary Chao (Commissioner Burman Chaired that advisory working group) that are part of the discussions around the important pipeline safety reauthorization legislation that we are mindful still needs to be enacted into law as the current Safe Pipes Act has expired.

Bottom-line—the integrity and reliability of our gas system is paramount—at the core of that is and must be safety. As utilities and regulators continue to work on the challenging issues confronting us with COVID 19 we are so very grateful that PHMSA is here today to share with us their thoughts and activities and allow a back and forth question and answer period so that we may all have even more tools to carry out our respective regulatory roles. With that I will turn it back over to Commissioner Burman and NARUC staff for the next part of this briefing as they will formally introduce the PHMSA team.