NARUC President Michael Caron Urges Commissions and Utilities to Remain Vigilant Protecting Customer and Worker Safety

As we face the August ‘dog days of summer,’ we are acutely aware that this summer has been unseasonably hotter than in recent years. (Perhaps the dog days actually began in June.) The extreme heat wave across the nation has raised concerns for our utility customers and for those utility workers who spend much of their day outside. It’s up to us, as regulators and those we regulate, to remain vigilant in ensuring the safety of both customers and workers.

Along with reliability, utility regulators are concerned with safety and affordability. The weather extremes that we have experienced (e.g., heat, storms) have a direct effect on members of our communities, who are more than just rate payers. They are our neighbors, friends, colleagues, and family. It is our duty, first and foremost, to ensure their safety.

During extreme weather conditions, most—if not all—public utility commissions have some form of moratorium in place that prevents utility shutoffs when the weather falls above or below certain temperatures. This is the absolute right approach and I commend all of the various states’ efforts aimed at balancing the immediate needs of our communities with that of the utility companies.

I also encourage all utilities to ensure that their outdoor workers have ample opportunities to take appropriate rest and hydration breaks. The grueling extreme temperatures mean that the health and safety of these workers must remain uppermost in our minds as well.

Finally, prolonged temperatures above 90 and 100 degrees translate into higher usage of A/C and fans, meaning higher bills for consumers. I have
no doubt that our members and the utilities are working together to develop solutions in the near and long term to help consumers avoid bill arrearages. My hope is that this summer’s temperatures are an anomaly. However, regardless of whether it’s an anomaly or not, we need to always be aware of our mission: to do what we can to prepare our distribution systems to be reliable, resilient, and safe.

**NARUC President Michael A. Caron**
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