

**Opening Statement**  
**Full Committee Nominations Hearing (Binz, Connor, Robinson)**  
**September 17, 2013**  
**Senator Lisa Murkowski**

It is always a pleasure to see our distinguished former Chairman, and Mr. Connor, I'd like to welcome you back to the Committee. As a former staff member, you know this room quite well, not to mention many of us behind the dais. You clearly know the significance that the Department of the Interior has to western states, in particular – you know firsthand the impact it can have on our lives and our lands. I am pleased to say that, on the basis of your prior service and the opportunity I have had to observe your work for some time, I please to be able to support your nomination today.

Dr. Robinson, I'd like to welcome you before our Committee. I appreciate the time you took to meet with my staff last week. I look forward to learning more about your work as the Chief Financial Officer at NASA, and to hearing your ideas for improving contracting and environmental management within DOE.

Finally, Mr. Binz, welcome also to the Committee. I appreciated meeting with you last week. We had an opportunity to discuss at that time that there has been a fair amount attention about your nomination, not only coming on as a member of the Commission, but as the Chair of the Commission. So there's a little added scrutiny, and I think appropriately so.

We recognize that FERC is independent by law and by design; it is clearly distinct from Executive Agencies that carry out policy directives from the White House. According to the organic act governing FERC, commissioners "shall be individuals who, by demonstrated ability, background, training, or experience are specially qualified to assess fairly the needs and concerns of all interests affected by Federal energy policy."

Mr. Binz, this committee clearly has a role to ensure FERC's continued independence. And, it's against this standard that is provided in the organic act, that I will express my concerns about your nomination to the Committee.

Specifically, I am concerned about your view of the role of regulators and how you would lead the Commission, if confirmed. You have written and spoken extensively about that role, and at this point, I'm not convinced that your views are compatible with FERC's mission. It is critically important for us to enable the Agency – and its professional non-partisan employees who report to the Chairman as their CEO – to maintain its strong culture as an expert agency free of undue political influence.

There's a lot at stake at FERC, more than most people realize. By one rough measure of economic impact, the energy transmitted over FERC-regulated pipes and wires is worth well over \$400 billion per year. Most Americans feel the impact of FERC's decisions in hundreds of individual cases and controversies – ultimately, we are talking about money from their pockets and the quality of their energy service.

I am also disturbed about coordination between FERC professional staff, White House staff, a public relations firm that by its own admission has been retained for the benefit of your nomination by an interest group, and lobbyists, at least one of whom I understood you to say you thought “might be” being paid by the same interest group, to advance your nomination. We may not have seen an effort like this before, and with good reason. Again, FERC is an independent agency. This kind of paid effort, for and with the cooperation of the nominee, must not become “the new normal.”

So I will look forward to hearing your response, Mr. Binz, to the concerns I have raised. I know others will raise issues as well. This is an important part of the process for any nominee, to gather information, not only directly from you in the venue of the committee, but also from the questions for the record that will be submitted afterwards. I also look forward to reviewing those as well.

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