



## The Hannah Report

Wednesday, Jan. 26, 2022

# DeWine Delivers on Promise: Energy Industry Has No Voice in PUCO Nominations

The energy industry will have no voice on the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Nominating Council when it meets next week to vet eight challengers to former energy counsel and sitting Commissioner Daniel Conway -- an appointment process warranting a major reset in light of late-breaking changes to council membership, the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) said Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Gov. Mike DeWine accepted the resignation of former Nominating Council Chairman Mike Koren, a former FirstEnergy lobbyist. The governor simultaneously appointed former OCC Governing Board Vice Chair Stuart Young and Ohio Telecom Association (OTA) Government Relations Director Cheryl Burchard, who now holds the council seat for utility industry representative. (See *The Hannah Report*, 1/25/22.)

In recent days, DeWine also named former OCC board member David Wondolowski to the nominating council.

Ohio Consumers' Counsel Bruce Weston and OCC Governing Board Chairman Michael Watkins, who was reelected to the top post Wednesday, have long called for an overhaul of nominating council and PUCO appointments to reflect the interests of average Ohio ratepayers. Koren had rebuffed Watkins' formal requests for a special meeting of the nominating council to discuss consumer-friendly reforms. (See *The Hannah Report*, 8/19/21, 10/29/21.)

At least four candidates for the latest commission appointment, including Conway, have ties of one kind or another to the energy industry. (See *The Hannah Report*, 1/21/22.) Weston is looking for change.

"Utility consumers got a good start to the new year when Gov. DeWine named two former OCC board members to the PUCO Nominating Council. Keep the reforms coming!" the consumers' counsel said Wednesday.

"Unfinished business for PUCO reforms includes (1) appointing consumer representatives as commissioners; (2) limiting utility influence; (3) strengthening the independence of the PUCO's auditing process; (4) reorganizing the PUCO by separating its technical staff from commissioners and hearing officers that judge cases; (5) eliminating utility advantages in case settlement negotiations; (6) toughening *ex parte* rules that prevent unfair private communications with commissioners; and (7) investigating the PUCO's relationship with FirstEnergy as a separate scandal from HB6," said Weston.

"Given the recent changes announced by the governor regarding the commissioner appointment process, the nominating council's just-closed application period should be reopened," he concluded.

In addition to Watkins' reelection as chair, former state Rep. Cheryl Grossman was elected Governing Board vice chair Wednesday to replace Young.

*Reprinted with the permission of Hannah. Story originally published in The Hannah Report on Jan. 26, 2022.*