

Profile: Public Service Commission Chair Rebecca Cameron Valcq

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WisPolitics.com is profiling some of the newly announced state agency heads. This installment features Public Service Commission Chair Rebecca Cameron Valcq.

The Wisconsin native most recently worked at Quarles and Brady before joining Gov. Tony Evers' administration.

Birthplace, age?

Greendale, Wis.; age 43.

Job history?

Most recently worked as a partner at Quarles & Brady in the Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Practice Group. Previously worked as regulatory counsel for We Energies.

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Education?

Undergraduate degree in political science and Spanish from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa; law school at Marquette University.

Family?

Married to husband, Rob, since 2001. Two kids: an 11-year-old daughter and a seven-year-old daughter.

Favorite non-work interests?

Cooking and seeing live music. She said she tries to never follow a recipe when cooking, although she'll use recipe books as a baseline.

“My sort of ideal day is being in my kitchen with my kids and my husband cooking and listening to really good music.”

Why the interest in being in the Evers administration?

I think part of my background coming from practicing energy law for the first part of my career, I saw it through a different lens. Then when I moved into private practice, I was exposed to different clients, developers and alternative energy suppliers, and that allowed me to see the industry through yet another lens. And when the opportunity presented itself to serve at the Public Service Commission, in my mind it was the absolute opportunity of a lifetime because it's an industry that I find so fascinating. And I wasn't aware of any commissioners who had had the type of energy background that I had. Um, so I was interested in trying to bring a different perspective and a different background to the agency.

What are your priorities for the agency under your leadership?

One of the really great benefits of being part of Gov. Evers' administration is that he's such an inspirational leader and he really believes in the expertise of his cabinet members. And so he's allowed us to sort of go out and talk to our agency staff and find out what are the big issues, what are the policies that we need to be looking at. And what I've learned over the last four months in speaking to everybody at the agency is that I think there are really three big priorities for the PSC. The first is how do we transition in Wisconsin from traditional ways of generating electricity — which have primarily been fossil-based fuels, right? — how do we make the transition from that older method of generating electricity to a zero-carbon future? The way that energy is generated, distributed, delivered and consumed has completely changed and that change has occurred pretty quickly. So that transition is going to take a lot of thought and a lot of careful analysis. There are a lot of things that have to be looked at. And what's exciting to me is that all the options are on the table. I don't think there's anything that we can say, 'No, no, no, that's not going to be part of making that transition,' because we have to remember that we've got the financial stability and viability of the utility companies, but then we've got the customer expectations to have safe, reliable, affordable energy. And making that transition is going to be so interesting and so challenging. So that's one of the policies that we're looking at. Another priority is 2019 is the year of clean water and at the Public Service Commission, we have water utilities under our jurisdiction. And (we want to ensure) that we are making the water utilities aware of the methods in which lead service lines can be replaced. So water issues are another top priority. And then access and affordability as it relates to broadband:

That's another, that's another major seismic shift that has occurred in the rather recent past. I think probably 10 or 15 years (ago), people thought of broadband as a luxury. I think now people understand it's no longer a luxury. It's a necessity. So those are the top three that I'm getting ready to sort of focus our efforts (on).

What should the agency be doing differently?

I don't necessarily think differently. I think that the Public Service Commission is full of very, very intelligent experts in their area. I mean, we've got engineers, we have auditors, we have financial analysts, we have environmental analysts and they're all really, really good at what they do. So I don't necessarily think that there's anything that needs to be improved. I think one of the things in general, and this is just my preferred way of looking at issues, is engaging a broader group of parties. And that can mean a lot of different things. It can mean talking to different people within the agency, talking to people at other agencies, right? So when we talk about things like broadband, what does that mean to tourism? What does that mean to agricultural farms and the agricultural community? What does that mean? You know, the possibilities to collaborate are endless. So I, I'm looking forward to just engaging a broad variety of people to help tackle some of these issues.

What's the best advice you've received since getting the job?

I think it's twofold. I've actually had the privilege of speaking to a couple of former chair-people of the commission. And not surprisingly, their advice was pretty similar and that is, this is going to be the most rewarding but challenging position of your career. So take a minute to just enjoy it, enjoy the challenges, enjoy the successes, even though they might feel like they're small. So to stop and enjoy it. And then the other piece of advice is a little more practical and that is block off time on your calendar to actually sit down and deliberate because you can get really swept up really quickly going from meeting to meeting to meeting and talking to different groups of people. But if you don't take the affirmative step to actually block off time to sit down and process and digest what you're hearing, you're going to be at a disadvantage. And I thought that that was just absolutely spot on and I've done it and it's working so far.

Worst advice?

Here's the advice: Take the Beltline. It's awful. It is awful. So I spend a lot of time in my car. I commute between Milwaukee and Madison on a daily basis. And just when I think, 'Okay, I'm here, I'm in Madison, I'm ready to go,' I get on that Beltline and it's a dead standstill. So that's my worst advice is take the Beltline.

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