Governor, New Energy Secretary Share Vision

BY PAUL JOSEPH
KECO News Director

Oklahoma’s new man for energy and the environment shares the same pro-business philosophy as the Environmental Protection Agency as they partner in bringing new businesses to the State of Oklahoma.

Kenneth Wagner, with roots in Eastern Oklahoma, is Governor Kevin Stitt’s Secretary of Energy and Environment.

In a recent interview, Wagner emphasized his desire to make Oklahoma “clean” when it comes to energy and the environment which will, in turn, attract new business growth to the state.

Wagner, who was tapped by Stitt while Wagner was a staffer at the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C., worked with former EPA administrator Scott Pruitt when the two were at a Tulsa-area law firm before Pruitt headed to the nation’s capital.

Wagner was then pulled to Washington by Pruitt, becoming a senior adviser to Pruitt during his term in office and creating a more cohesive field presence for EPA.

Most of the work, actual implementation of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act and the rules promulgated under all the environmental statutes are actually implemented, delegated from EPA to the states and are implemented at the state level.

“The people that oversee that implementation are primarily the regions. Oklahoma is out of (the) Dallas (region). I coordinated those (offices), but I was also responsible for all 50 states’ partnerships with the EPA, like the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. I developed partnerships and physically visited the majority, if not almost all of the states, 48 of the 50 states during my two years there.

“I sat down with every program (head) in every state and found out what they did, why they did it, with whom they did it, how they could improve their process with EPA.

“So, I think I built a rapport and working knowledge (with) most of the states (and) how their programs worked or didn’t work. The governor felt like that was a good platform for our state to have as the resource.” Wagner added.

Stitt appointed Wagner following the November 2018 general election to the state cabinet-level position. Oklahoma previously had separate cabinet positions for energy and environment, but Gov. Mary Fallin combined those during her first term.

“Wagner’s bond and friendship through working together in Oklahoma was the quality that Pruitt wanted on Capitol Hill.

“I went to Washington D.C. to be his senior adviser on region and state matters, actually regional and state affairs was my title. I was somebody he trusted. Before he was (Oklahoma) Attorney General he was affiliated with my law firm in Tulsa. The important thing about that is that after (Pruitt) left (the EPA), I stayed at the EPA until January 9, 2019. My role continued under acting administrator Andrew Wheeler. In fact, I’d say that I was actually more involved after he took over than I was when Administrateur Pruitt was in place.”

But, for Governor Stitt, it was Wagner’s holistic approach to energy and the environment that Stitt found most attractive. Wagner says the two men share a vision.

“It think it’s all rooted in the idea. First of all, I believe strongly that energy policy, environmental policy, agricultural policy are all really interwoven that you can’t really separate them. So, you have to consider how it affects all of those when you’re developing policy.”

Governor Stitt didn’t come from an energy background. He was in the financial services industry. So, his policy as it relates to energy and environment is still evolving, so I don’t want to get too far ahead of him. But, I will tell you that he is very much in all the above. He’s the kind of guy when it comes to field sources that we want to, number one, create an atmosphere where any consumer or business that wants to choose a field source would be able to do so without regulatory burden or barriers to entry into the market place.

“We want there to be a free market choice of what you choose to use for a field source, whether its natural gas or wind power or electric vehicles or CNG vehicles or good, old fashioned straight petroleum. We want to make sure that Oklahomans have good policy in place that allows for that. But, what I would also say is that we want to champion policies that result in measurably cleaner air, cleaner land and cleaner water; in beautiful (See Energy Secretary next page)

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