Last week, the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) held their spring meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss, among several things, the changing energy and regulatory landscape during a Trump administration. One panel, entitled “Exploring our Energy Future,” included AFPM President and CEO Chet Thompson. Thompson discussed the overall optimism currently in the industry, resulting from a new administration that sees the energy industry as a partner to help rebuild and strengthen the economy, and not a threat to the social well-being of its citizens.

During the discussion, Thompson had a very straightforward message about the importance of energy derived from fossil fuels, and how best to move forward without sacrificing the benefits they bring to our everyday life. Thompson made clear that development of our natural resources and responsible environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive, and, for the foreseeable future, nations around the globe will continue to rely on fossil fuels to provide the reliable, abundant, and affordable energy needed to fuel the world and its expanding population. Thompson added there is certainly relief among AFPM members that the current administration has issued executive orders to expedite infrastructure development, such as the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Moreover, the administration has committed to revisiting several regulations and has made clear that it has no intention to over-regulate the industry as in years past, which has only stifled the productivity of refiners and petrochemical manufacturers. During the discussion, the topic of renewable energy was raised, and Thompson discussed how refiners and petrochemical manufacturers help make an “all of the above” energy policy possible through the manufacturing of components used for solar panels, wind turbines, and the fuels that are used on the farm to harvest crops for biofuels. Thompson did, however, note that programs, such as the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), is significantly flawed and is not accomplishing what it was intended to, and explained that it is time to repeal or significantly reform this failed program.

While discussing subsidies, Thompson reaffirmed that AFPM members do not receive any, and noted how he welcomed an open and honest discussion about subsidies in the energy market. One example he raised was why should those who can afford six-figure electric cars like Teslas, receive exorbitant tax breaks up to $15,000? They shouldn’t, nor should ratepayers be forced to pay for the installation of electric vehicle charging stations, when only a few use them. He added that AFPM believes the federal government should not be picking winners and losers and that we would happily operate in an environment where all energy producers do not get any tax breaks. This would level the playing field and allow the free market to operate properly and allow consumers to decide what is best for them.

Finally, Thompson addressed how he anticipates a return to cooperative federalism and expects states to have more input in the rulemaking process. He also added that despite increased energy usage, emissions are dropping, thanks to the efficiency and innovation of America’s refiners and petrochemical manufacturers. This panel was a great opportunity to have an open dialogue with state environmental regulators and interested parties on the importance of fossil fuels, today and in the future, and how AFPM is leading the way in delivering the progress necessary to produce the fuels and goods that people far too often take for granted.

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