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KRISTA TANNER

Vice President, ITC Holdings Corp.
President, ITC Midwest

By Dave DeWitte

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Although she's only 41, ITC Midwest President Krista Tanner has built an impressive record of accomplishments that can serve as a model to other women in the state's utility industry. Ms. Tanner began as an attorney working in utility regulation cases, was appointed to the Iowa Utilities Board and later became director of regulatory policy at Alliant Energy. She's now about a year into her tenure as president of ITC Midwest, which owns and operates the former Alliant Energy transmission system in Iowa, and spoke with the CBJ about the company's role in Iowa's energy mix.

ITC doesn't have much direct contact with electric consumers. Why should consumers care about your company's role in providing them with power?

As the owner and operator of electric transmission lines in the area, ITC plays a major role in allowing electricity to be reliably delivered to utilities, communities and eventually customers. Although customers don't write a separate check to ITC when they pay their light bills, we are working behind the scenes to ensure reliable electric service to hundreds of communities across Iowa, Minnesota and the other states we serve. The decisions we make affect customers' ability to access different forms of electric generation and whether their service is reliable. Our work contributes to the costs customers pay for their service. For that reason alone, I think it's important that consumers know who we are.

Reliability is the name of the game in electrical transmission. Do you feel ITC has made any gains in that department, and are there any statistics to support that?

We have made significant improvements in the reliability of our system. We continue to see improvement in comparison with other utilities through industry rankings. Our system outages are down 36 percent since 2008, and our highest voltage lines are now in the top 10 percent of systems for shortest average outage duration, according to one recent comparison. But the most rewarding measure for me has been the response of our stakeholders. When

AGE: 41

HOMETOWN: West Des Moines

FAMILY: Husband, Dean, and two daughters, ages 10 and 13

EDUCATION: Bachelor of Arts, University of Northern Iowa; J.D., Drake University; currently completing MBA from University of Iowa

INTERESTS: Activities with daughters, volunteer organizations and church

I talk to utilities and communities that are served by lines or substations we have upgraded, they are universally grateful for that improvement. I also hear regularly from stakeholders who are eager for us to make those same improvements in areas we haven't gotten to yet.

Plans for some major energy transmission infrastructure across Iowa, such as the Rock Island Clean Line and the Keystone Pipeline, have caused a landowner backlash and legislative proposals that would further restrict the ability of those transmission operators to obtain land through eminent domain. ITC didn't have a dog in the fight, but as a former regulator, do you have a perspective to share on those proposals?

As a former member of the Iowa Utilities Board, I have great respect for the process and the work of the board members and staff. They work very hard to balance the needs of landowners and the energy needs of the state, and that isn't always an easy balance to find.

As a representative of a company that needs to site infrastructure across the country, I can say ITC recognizes the need to find that balance. We work very hard to partner with landowners to secure voluntary easements, and we've had great success doing that. For the more than 150 miles of high-voltage line we're currently building in Iowa, we have been able to obtain roughly 96 percent of the easements we need through voluntary support from landowners. I think we do that because we treat people with respect. There's no doubt we need to build the grid to keep pace with energy demands. But you need to do it in a way that is respectful to landowners. It's the right thing to do.

When ITC acquired Alliant Energy's transmission assets, it also allowed the creation of a transmission cost rider that directly passes along transmission costs to consumers. This has meant higher rates for Alliant consumers as ITC has upgraded the system, even though a regulatory reserve account was set up by Alliant with funds from the sale to cushion the impact. Has ITC taken any steps to stabilize or reverse the upward trend in the transmission rider?

After years of underinvestment in the system, the investment we're making improves service but also brings additional costs for customers. We recognize that and are continually challenged to make sure every dollar spent is the best dollar spent. And we've renewed our efforts there. It's really my top focus right now. We work closely with stakeholders to make sure our investments match their priorities. We're controlling the things we can control and we work very hard to keep our operations and maintenance costs flat year to year.

But costs are only half the equation. There's also the greater value customers receive from a system that is operating more efficiently, effectively and allowing them to access lower-cost electricity. We're alleviating transmission constraints that add to customer costs. We're reducing transmission outages, knowing that loss of production or productivity as a result of an outage is also a heavy cost for customers. Anecdotally, I hear it all the time. When customers don't have reliable electric service, they appreciate what reliability brings.

You've been on quite a few different sides of the regulatory equation now – as an attorney in utility law, as a member of the Iowa Utilities Board and now as an executive of a transmission utility. This isn't an unusual career path in the utility industry, but do you think it serves the consumer well?

I would like to think that while I have changed the hats I've worn, my mission has not changed. I've always felt my role was to be an advocate for the customer and to be accountable to the public. As a regulator, I was responsible to the public I served. As a utility company president, my role is to advocate for customers, because our success depends on their success. I think doing what's best for customers is the right thing to do. That has been my philosophy whether I was a regulator, a private attorney or a utility executive. And if I carry that philosophy out successfully, then I do think it serves consumers well.

It's good to see more women in leadership roles within the utility industry, individuals such as yourself and Patricia Kampling of Alliant Energy. Do you make an effort to serve as a role model and mentor for women, or is it more important to be equally supportive of the whole organization?

I have benefited from strong mentors throughout my career, and I feel it's my duty to help others in return. I have always enjoyed mentoring my younger colleagues, both men and women, but I think it is fair to say that I make a concerted effort to mentor young women. Young mothers, in particular, often seek advice from me on work-life balance and the issues that come with juggling work and home life. They also look around and see that there aren't many women in leadership roles in our industry and they wonder if they have a future in it. I try to assure them that the utility industry is a great industry where women have many opportunities to make a difference.

ITC has many women in executive leadership, which I find gratifying. But it's still not common. I was in a meeting with outside groups a couple weeks ago when I looked around and realized there were no other women in the meeting. I wish that wasn't the case, and I'll do what I can to make sure it's not the case at ITC. **CBJ**