



The switch from Democratic to Republican control will free up an additional GOP slot, providing Trump with an opportunity to shape the commission's makeup. | Getty

Potential Trump FCC names spark early chatter

By **TONY ROMM** and **MARGARET HARDING MCGILL** | 11/30/16 02:35 PM EST

NEW YORK — Senior aides to President-elect Donald Trump could tap an ally of Vice President-elect Mike Pence as they weigh candidates to fill a soon-to-be-open Republican slot on the FCC.

Telecom insiders are buzzing about Brandt Hershman, the Republican floor leader in the Indiana state Senate and a close associate of Pence from his time as Indiana governor. Pence's role as the chief of Trump's transition team could give Hershman an early edge to become a new FCC commissioner, sources told POLITICO. Hershman declined to comment for this story.

A former aide to President George H.W. Bush, Hershman has long been an advocate of deregulation: In 2006, he wrote and helped pass the first update to Indiana telecom law in two decades, an overhaul that limited the state's ability to regulate phone rates and offer its own government-backed broadband service.

While it's still early in the selection process — and any list of candidates is tentative — telecom industry sources believe Trump will pick a FCC candidate with a strong deregulatory focus. Many Republicans would like to unwind the agency's net neutrality order, which subjects internet service providers to utility-like rules and passed last year under Chairman Tom Wheeler, an Obama nominee.

"I would expect somebody who looks at the FCC in a much more restrained and focused fashion," said Roger Entner, founder and lead analyst at Recon Analytics. And that person, he said, would probably take a hatchet to Wheeler's record.

"From what little we know about President-elect Trump, he wants to stimulate investment," Entner said. "Who are the biggest investors in this country? The telcos. If he wants to stimulate investment, he would undo a lot of the items or change or adjust the items that are probably most growth-preventative."

A spokesman for Trump's transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

For now, the speculation in the telecom industry is that Ajit Pai, currently the FCC's senior Republican, could be elevated to chairman, either on an acting or permanent basis. Still, the switch from Democratic to Republican control will free up an additional GOP slot, providing Trump with an opportunity to shape the commission's makeup.

Given Trump's campaign promise to "drain the swamp" in Washington, there's chatter about other potential FCC candidates from outside D.C. One name circulating is Ellen Nowak, chairwoman of Wisconsin's public service commission. She was appointed by Gov. Scott Walker, a Trump backer. Nowak declined comment on this story.

Before the election, Trump's team also reached out to Bret Swanson, an Indiana native who runs a tech research firm called Entropy Economics and is close to Jeffrey Eisenach, the Trump transition point person for the FCC, according to a source with knowledge of the discussion.

Some Republican congressional aides have popped up too as potential FCC candidates: David Redl, who works for the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and David Quinalty, who advises the Senate Commerce Committee. And there's talk of Rep. Marsha

Blackburn (R-Tenn.), who serves on the House Energy and Commerce panel. Blackburn met with the president-elect this week, and was later elevated to a vice chair of his transition team. Her office declined to comment on this story.

Other FCC watchers are keeping tabs on familiar D.C. Republicans like Mike Gallagher, president of the Entertainment Software Association. Gallagher led the National Telecommunications and Information Administration during the presidency of George W. Bush, and his organization declined to comment.

Another industry candidate could be Keith Murphy, a lobbyist for Viacom, though it is unclear how Trump's ethics rules might apply to such a nomination. Murphy did not respond to a request for comment.