

Despite unalterable opposition of liberal senators to oil lawyer Robert H. Morris of San Francisco, he might have been confirmed as a Federal Power Commission (FPC) member had it not been for a private telephone conversation between him and Republican Sen. John Tower of Texas.

Tower, a leading oil industry advocate, had been disturbed by Morris' opposition to deregulation of natural gas prices. Was this, Tower wondered, just an attempt by Morris to obliterate his pro-industry association as attorney for Standard Oil of California and thus win over anti-oil liberals senators?

So, Tower placed an eleventh-hour telephone call to Morris. On a confidential basis, he asked Morris: Do you really oppose deregulation? Morris' reply: Yes, I do. That was enough. Tower promptly helped line up other Western conservative Republicans—Sens. Wallace Bennett of Utah, Clifford Hansen of Wyoming and Paul Fannin of Arizona—to oppose Morris.

For their part, the liberals opposed him. Despite his deregulation position, they could not forgive his closeness to the oil industry. Having won the worst of two worlds, Morris was rejected, 49 to 44.

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