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## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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### **AMP Board Chair and President/CEO share insights on how the past has uniquely prepared AMP and its members for the future**

AMP recently interviewed Jolene Thompson, president and CEO of AMP, and Jeff Brediger, director of utilities in Orrville and the AMP Board of Trustees Chair, to gather their thoughts on the value of joint action, reflections on AMP's first 50 years and — looking forward — their insight on AMP's strategic priorities and initiatives in the coming years.

**AMP:** You have dedicated your career to preserving and protecting public power. Why is that so important to you?

**Brediger:** I'll probably just sum it up in three words ... and that's local, public and yours. Community control is crucial to our success and meeting the diverse needs that we have. Trust, respect, responsiveness is really what it's all about. It's in our DNA. And I believe we all want to see our communities thrive. And it's great to play a role in it.

**Thompson:** I had the opportunity to come to AMP as an intern after college in the communications department. At that time, we were 30-some employees, we only had members in Ohio — a much smaller organization. I came into the Member Services Department, and I had the opportunity to get out on the road, meet our members. I really gained such an appreciation for what public power is. ... I got to see the local ownership, the devotion to public service that our members have, how much they care about doing the right thing for their communities and their customers. And then, being able to play a part of that was really exciting. Then my career transitioned at AMP, and I had the opportunity to go down to the Statehouse and lobby (and) advocate on behalf of our members. We were pretty much in hand-to-hand combat with private utilities who were trying to limit our home rule authority. ... I got to have an opportunity to sort of go to battle with people who were attacking the public power business model, which made me even more of a believer. I also had the opportunity to work with our members on grassroots and saw how passionate they were about their systems, and that was infectious.

**AMP:** Thinking of AMP's first 50 years, what three key milestones do you think have been crucial to propelling the organization to where it is today?

**Brediger:** Aside from what drove us to [the founding of] the organization in the beginning, I believe our shift to get our members to diversify our energy portfolios to minimize costs due to the market risk was a top item. Certainly, the addition of our member-owned generation a decade or so ago was a huge step. And now, with the acquisition of the transmission assets to help us better manage the cost, I'd put those in the top three. However, I'd be remiss if I didn't include the mutual aid program, and what OMEA and APPA does for us on the political front.

**Thompson:** There are so many things that have happened in AMP's history that were it not for those events, we wouldn't be where we are today. It's difficult to narrow it down to

three, so I'm going to categorize AMP's history into three phases instead, all of which have been absolutely critical to the organization's success. And the first one of those is recognizing and rallying around the benefits of joint action. This was in the very early days — just understanding that we could be stronger together, that the economies of scale that could be provided by working together would benefit all of the public power systems across the region. The second one of those are the foundational, legal, regulatory and legislative victories. We decided we could work together — our members did, our founders did — and then got to the business of fighting for the rights that they needed in order to be successful. ... The last phase has been strategic growth. We have gotten stronger by having members across nine states, by having such a diverse portfolio, by having such a great group of subject matter experts on our staff. It's given us a stronger presence in the industry, a stronger voice and policy.

**AMP:** **When you first became Chair of the Board and/or President and CEO of AMP, what goals did you set for yourself and for the organization?**

**Brediger:** The goals were to hopefully to live up to the responsibilities of the chair position. That's a little different, sitting in the board seat [is different] than the chairman's seat. For me, it's always been about support for the members. I wanted to see us develop more behind the meter generation options. I wanted us to continue evaluating cost and economies of scale that the organization can bring to its members and to support the industry transitions, to deal with climate-related challenges. Really, in the end, I want to increase member value and provide high-value services.

**Thompson:** I identified four areas that I thought were important to me to focus on. And that was engaged and equipped members; engaged and high-performing workforce; operational, financial, administrative excellence; and then industry and policy relevance. Pretty much runs the gamut of everything that we need to be focusing on. ... One of the most important things to me in that first priority identified was engaged and equipped members. I had the opportunity to sit down in a virtual environment and talk to more than 70 of our member community officials, so 70 different communities' principal contacts, and really hear from them about what was happening in their local community, what were the challenges they had, what were the opportunities they saw, what role can AMP play in helping them be successful, and that information was incredibly valuable to bring back to our team internally and to the Board. And the Board used that as part of informing its strategic planning process for our strategic priorities for '21 through '24. ... So again, those four priorities — I think they align well with what we've ended up with as our strategic plan initiatives that the Board identified. And those will continue to be focuses for me going forward.

**AMP:** **In 2020, the AMP board updated its mission, vision and values statements. How do you believe those align with the core reason for AMP's existence and why it was founded? And how will the updated mission, vision and values prepare AMP and its members for future success?**

**Brediger:** I think they clarified what the organization has been about since its very beginning. And, again, it's about the members. Our day-to-day challenges are ever-increasing back home; everybody — whether you're in my seat, or the distribution superintendent, or wherever — we need a solid bench. And we need strong

advocates in areas where we don't have expertise in. And I believe in surrounding yourself with good people you know, that know you and that you can trust.

**Thompson:** It was really important to everyone on the executive team and to the Board, that we have a very member-centric mission and vision, which we do. AMP's mission is to serve our members through public power joint action, innovative solutions, robust advocacy, and cost-effective management of power supply and energy services. And our vision is to be public power's trusted leader in providing members and their customers the highest quality, forward-looking services and solutions. Those really just hit on exactly what we're all about, the areas of the organization that are important to members. Obviously power supply is our foundational reason, but we have a great suite of value-added member programs. We really need to play a role in helping our members sort of assess what's happening in the industry and decide which things are priorities, what direction their systems want to go, what the best decisions are for them with all the changes that are happening in the industry, and then keep in mind the importance of joint action. One of the things that, I think, aligns well with all of this, is the fact that we're in the process of closing out our 50th anniversary celebration, and it gave us an opportunity to go back and do a little revisiting of where we came from and look at where we're going in the future. I think our mission, vision and values line up very well with where we are headed.

**AMP:** **Looking forward, the AMP board recently adopted four new strategic priorities and related initiatives. Can you talk about how you believe these four priorities — along with the updated mission, vision and values — will prepare AMP and its members for the revolutionary changes that we are currently experiencing and will be facing in the future?**

**Brediger:** I think what's ahead for all of us is just dealing with the changing technology. It's increasingly difficult for us to keep up with the existing technology, let alone tomorrow's technologies. And our customers expect that from us, and they assume that that just naturally happens. These strategies that we've developed will help the members sift down to the specifics they need to help them adapt to their individual needs and concerns back home. And I also believe that they will strengthen our respect in the industry, and the political arenas that we operate in, as well as supporting what we need to accomplish back home.

**Thompson:** We have four AMP strategic priorities, and one AMPT strategic priority to govern our operations, guide us, guide staff in putting together programs and in our actions going forward for the next three, four years, 2021 to 2024. And, again, the industry really is changing. You know, we put together a list that was shown at our annual meeting the last few years of all the game changers in the industry, and that list keeps growing and changing. if we would have talked about some of the things that are happening now, with technology and customer preferences, five or 10 years ago, people would have thought (that's) 20 years from now; but it's not, it's now. It's today. And so a big part of the initiatives that are in our strategic plan for our team to tackle are things that are designed to have us step back and assess what makes the most sense. We need to sort through things; there's a lot. You could go out and try to do too much. We need to help members say, here are the things we need to focus on. Here's what makes the most sense for our systems right now, and how do we best go about doing that. And that's not one-size-fits-all; we have a very diverse membership. ... Our job at AMP, and I heard this in my conversations with our members, is to make sure members are aware of what's happening in the industry,

what trends are taking place, and then help prioritize those, help work through those and identify the things that we think really are worth a deeper dive and some local decision-making.

**AMP:** **Looking ahead to the next several years, or decades, what changes do you see coming to the electric industry, and how do you see AMP and public power changing as a result of that?**

**Brediger:** Now we're getting into a lot of crystal ball stuff in here. But I would say as we look to shifting into this decarbonized world related to the climate change strategies that are coming out, we need to retain seats at the planning and decision-making tables; we need to be engaged. There are a lot of big ideas being floated around out there, and we must be proactive and more united if we are to hold on to the local control part of our being, to end up with the things that make sense for us. ... That's a concern I have for, you know, going forward. I look forward to the future with some optimism, but I see some of our members really struggling for that identity, that competitive edge, that we've enjoyed for decades. I see AMP maybe shifting the types of services in order for us to be able to sustain that.

Just as we're today focused on grid infrastructure, I see, you know, distribution infrastructure needs are looming too. So, we need to be wary of those and put that same amount of effort and energy and, hopefully, resources and backing, to prop up that portion. Because combined with the water, wastewater and other services we provide, that set us apart from the private sector, the challenge to maintain these for small- and medium-sized members are going to require new support means to sustain what most of us have been doing over the past 100 years.

**Thompson:** I don't think that the founding members of AMP thought AMP would be where it is today when they envisioned AMP 50 years ago. It's very difficult to say where I think we're going to be 50 years from now. There's a lot happening in the industry. In addition to very engaged members and (an) engaged Board and a really dedicated team of employees, AMP also has some really sophisticated partners that we work with nationally. And by working with these groups, we're able to more quickly assimilate and sort through the information about what's going on in the industry.

But at the end of the day, what I know about public power and what I know about AMP is that the organization and our members have the critical qualities that will position us for success in the future. Having said that, we have to be on top of what's happening. And it's happening much more quickly than changes in the industry have happened in the past. In the past, there would be a piece of regulation that could take anywhere from two to three to five, even 10 years to get enacted, and you'd have many opportunities to influence it. Today, things aren't happening that way. They're happening by customers being able to go out and access a platform and make choices that they haven't had the opportunity to do in the past. And you can't stop these things from happening. It's technology; it's customer engagement. We just need to make sure we're at the table and helping our customers through the changes in the industry, and working with them on that. I have every bit of faith that AMP is going to be in a great place in 50 years because of all the people who are going to come after all of us who are in the industry today. And they're going to feel the same way about public power and about AMP that those of us who are here now today do.

**AMP:** What is something that you would say to somebody 50 years down the road who might be coming into the same position as you did when you first started working with AMP? What's something you would say to them about the organization and how it can benefit them?

**Brediger:** Well, you can't walk into this industry in a vacuum. The subject matter is so diverse, and so complicated that you need to reach out and look for help, (even if) that's just to commiserate around a room with others who are in your same situation. Our industry has continuously come out with new issues, new demands, or new regulations, or new policies that are so interwoven, that it really takes a broader, diverse group of people looking at it from all the angles. It's kind of like, you know, playing your multi-dimensional chess game ... it's not the problem at hand; it's about all the different relationships and all the different doors and paths you have to take, and you have to open up all those doors to understand all the implications behind them, because the answers are not as clear as they used to be, and you have to pick the best one. And those best ones don't rise to the surface as easily as they did in the past. I talked about having that deep, solid bench; we have those experts (at AMP) in those areas that we just kind of come in and out of on an as-needed sort of basis. But we are very fortunate to have an organization that plays in that broader pool of groups and entities so we can make sure we're keeping all the perspectives in mind. (The) diverse membership (that) we have, it brings a lot of values with it, because we're getting a lot of opinions. ... We need to have that depth and that understanding and those reality checks along the way because our world is a little bit more contained in a box. And when we're addressing legislative issues or political issues, or certainly some of the bigger issues like climate change, — so many moving parts, so many unknowns — we all need help. I think that's the power in this organization and our members understand that.

**Thompson:** What I think is really important is getting to know our members. I cannot tell you how valuable it was, the opportunity I had when I was out on the road, working with our members, sitting in city council meetings, understanding what they go through locally. And that's one of the things that's really important to me to try to have folks here understand on staff, without being able to send all 200 of our employees out on the road to the member communities. What is it like to be in a member community? What are the challenges? Large, small, medium-sized communities, doesn't matter where they are. They care. They don't get thanked a lot. Usually, they only hear when people are upset. And I think it's important to understand, walk a mile in our members' shoes, really understand what that's like. I may not have worked in a member community, but I've worked with our member communities long enough that I understand. It's difficult. It's really tough. The Seven Hats award is, it's really more like 12 hats. And again, they don't get thanked. They care; they're in there trying to do the right thing. They're very talented folks who dedicated their careers to public service. And they, you know, they have that direct connection with the customer that an investor-owned utility does not. If you want to talk to the CEO of a public power system, you talk to the CEO of the public power system — in the grocery, the library, church, on the street, the local festival, there's no escaping that. And so, I think the most important thing for anyone coming to AMP is to understand — what is it like to be in one of our member communities? What is it like to do their jobs?

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