

## **Commissioner Clements: Public Feedback Makes for a Better OPP**

Commissioner Allison Clements discusses the path to establishing FERC's Office of Public Participation

Recorded April 26, 2021

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Welcome to Open Access, I'm Tamara Young-Allen. We're excited today because this is our guest's first appearance on the podcast. So, welcome to Commissioner Allison Clements, who is here to discuss FERC's efforts to gather public comment on establishing a new Office of Public Participation, and her first few months at FERC.

**Commissioner Clements:** Thanks, Tamara. It's great to be here.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** You've only been at FERC since December, yet you've jumped in feet first to lead this public comment effort on establishing the new Office of Public Participation. Tell us why you feel this is such an important effort for you and for FERC.

**Commissioner Clements:** Sure, and thanks, Tamara, for taking the time to ask questions on what I do think is an important topic. The Office of Public Participation is an office that Congress envisioned back in 1978 as part of revisions to the Federal Power Act that would assist members of the public in accessing some of the Commission's technical and, oftentimes, less-than-transparent proceedings.

Several years ago, as a stakeholder, I worked with public interest organizations and actually signed on to a petition to advocate that the Commission go ahead and set up this office. So, it's really come full circle for me, and I'm honored that Chairman Glick has given me the opportunity to take a role leading on the initiative. In my mind, the goal of the office is not to necessarily change the proceedings that exist at the Commission, but to provide an opportunity to have more voices heard in those proceedings in a way that makes the Commission's decisionmaking process stronger and more durable.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** So – the public outreach in which you and the Office of Public Participation team have been engaged is a very different approach to the Commission's work than what FERC has done in the past, in that we have hosted a series of listening sessions and a Commissioner-led public workshop. And this is being implemented during Covid. For those who are not familiar with the outreach effort, can you please explain this process?

**Commissioner Clements:** Sure. I think we've taken, attempted – the staff team that's working on this, principally, we've attempted to ensure that we're using a lot of ways to seek public input because part of the problem is that actually intervening in Commission proceedings is an unknown process to a lot of people who don't have access to FERC lawyers and who don't have access even to the Internet, if they live in rural communities impacted by infrastructure decisions. So, we've consulted with other government agencies who are more experienced at this kind of public input process. And as a result, we are in the process of holding six listening sessions, which are on-the-record opportunities for members of the public to speak for a few minutes each, without having to register on FERC eLibrary and submit written comments in the form that FERC usually accepts them.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** What have you learned from this process, so far? Do you have any observations or first impressions, after hearing the public's concerns?

**Commissioner Clements:** I've been really surprised. I've paused several times over the last few months to reflect on the experiences that people have had and the trouble that some people have had engaging with the Commission. What has been the most encouraging to me is the fact that although people have felt discouraged or disenfranchised in the past relative to their experiences with the Commission, they have been really thoughtful in terms of the recommendations that they've made. They've turned those experiences into productive recommendations that the Commission can follow in establishing this office via its charge.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** So, once the Commission has collected all the comments from this outreach effort, what comes next?

**Commissioner Clements:** Sure, well as I mentioned, we've now held a total of six Office of Public Participation input sessions, a Commissioner-led workshop, and we've had an open comment period throughout that time for written comments to be submitted. And I think it's really great that through the FERC staff's really strong efforts, we've held four listening sessions during the day, one in the evening, and we are about to hold another in Spanish. And we have this report now due by June 25<sup>th</sup> of this year to indicate the Commission's status and progress on the office. And certainly, via all of those mechanisms for input, we now have a high volume of comments to process and to analyze in order to try and come up with the best plan to submit back to the Appropriations Committee. The public submitted really helpful feedback for us to consider, from small-scale to bigger-picture recommendations, and we're looking forward to really trying to support rural communities, landowners and consumers where they are through this effort.

And I've also mentioned that, coming next, related to the Office of Public Participation in some ways, or at least complementary to it, is the Chairman's announcement in February of this year that the Commission's going to be bringing on a new senior position focused on ensuring environmental justice and equity concerns are given full consideration. So, there's a lot happening around issues related to public interaction with the agency, and we're certainly staying busy on that front.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** With the time we have left, let me switch gears a little bit. Again, you're new to the Commission, having joined in December – as you know, we're still working remotely, so you haven't had the opportunity to work physically in your office and have face-to-face interaction with FERC staff. Working remotely has been strange enough for those of us who have been around FERC for a while. How has this experience been for you?

**Commissioner Clements:** It's been a really great experience so far. I'm honored to play the role of a Commissioner, along with the four other members of the FERC Commission, and I think that since Chairman Glick was appointed in his new role, we've really hit the ground running, so there's been a lot going on, and that helps us to forget that we're not all together in person.

You know, I think my daughters are really great young co-workers, but I'd really rather be in person with my team of impressive advisors and assistants. So, hopefully, we'll get that chance soon.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Aside from the work you're doing on the Office of Public Participation, are there other things that you are particularly interested in pursuing during your time here at FERC?

**Commissioner Clements:** Sure. There's just so much going on in the world and the role of the Commission is to ensure reliable and affordable electricity while all of this change is happening at a fast pace, including the increasing amount of natural disasters, wildfires, drought that we're worrying about as we come into the summer as well as extreme weather events as we just experienced last month in Texas. So there's a lot going on, and that requires focus and priority on market design efficiency, to transmission system planning and cost allocation, to cyber security. And the Commission's already exploring a lot of these issues, as I come on board, and I'm looking forward certainly to digging in deeper as we get going.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Any surprises so far about FERC and/or your experiences as a Commissioner?

**Commissioner Clements:** Ah, every day I think is a surprise, something new takes place. I have to say I'm very impressed by the Commission's staff. They really are remarkable in terms of their expertise and their commitment to the work, so that might not be that surprising, but it's certainly been enjoyable.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Great. Very interesting. Well thank you so much for joining us today, Commissioner Clements. And thanks for all the work you've done on the Office of Public Participation. Hope we'll get to talk to you soon on a future podcast.

**Commissioner Clements:** Thanks, Tamara. It's been a pleasure.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Thanks so much! And thank you, everyone, for listening today.

**Craig Cano:** FERC is an independent regulatory agency that oversees the interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas and oil. FERC reviews proposals to construct and operate interstate natural gas pipelines and liquefied natural gas terminals and oversees the licensing of nonfederal hydropower projects. FERC protects the reliability of the high-voltage interstate transmission system through mandatory reliability standards, and it monitors interstate energy markets to ensure that everyone in those markets is playing by the rules. Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in these podcasts are personal views and do not necessarily express the views of individual Commissioners or the Commission as a whole. This podcast is a production of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Office of External Affairs. We will be updating our posts when we've got more news, so be sure to check out our website, [www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov), and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to find out when our next podcast airs.