

## **FERC Open Access Podcast**

### **Meet Commissioner Willie Phillips**

**FERC's newest Commissioner, Willie Phillips, discusses his priorities as a member of the Commission  
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**Tamara Young-Allen:** Welcome to Open Access, I'm Tamara Young-Allen. Today we are joined by FERC's newest Commissioner, Willie Phillips, who joined the Commission in December 2021, after being nominated by President Joe Biden and confirmed by the United States Senate. Welcome, Commissioner Phillips. We're so glad you could join us for your first podcast interview.

**Commissioner Willie Phillips:** Thank you. Thank you for having me.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Since this is your first time on open access, please tell us a little bit about yourself.

**Commissioner Phillips:** Well, I mean I think a lot of people know that I'm a D.C. resident. I've lived in D.C. for over 20 years but I'm originally from Alabama. I grew up in a small town outside of Mobile, Ala., called Fairhope, located on the eastern shore of the Mobile Bay. We grew up on the water, me and my family, swimming, fishing pretty much year-round were some of the activities that we love to do, so I'm drawn to the water.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Cool. OK. So you joined FERC at such an important time, amid discussions and debates on climate, security and reliability challenges facing the FERC-regulated electricity and natural gas industries. What are the top three issues that you will be focusing on during your time here at FERC?

**Commissioner Phillips:** Well it's no secret that my top priorities are reliability, affordability and sustainability. And to drill down on that a little bit, you know I start with reliability because that is the bulk of my experience. Consumers have an expectation that the lights are going to be on 24/7. And as regulators, I believe that we could never forget that that's Job No. 1 – keeping the lights on. And I think it's a mistake to view the electric and natural gas systems as two separate systems. Increasingly, know they are one system, in my view. That's why I support calls for gas reliability standards, or, at a minimum, cybersecurity standards similar to what we have in the bulk electric system, with the CIP standards.

Turning to affordability. Affordability is important to me because of my lived experiences. I know that the struggle is real for many families out there, and that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. So it's never far from my mind as I do this work, those who are even less fortunate than me and where I grew up. This is in part why think it's so important that we look out for environmental justice communities, those communities who are traditionally most impacted by infrastructure projects and industrial pollution. What we're really talking about though, when we talk about EJ communities, is fair treatment and meaningful engagement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin. I can't think of any reason why anyone would be opposed to that.

And finally, I believe that we all stand to benefit greatly from the clean energy transition. One of the things I'm most excited about is exploring grid enhancing technologies – technologies like dynamic line ratings, things that we can use to increase the efficiency of our grid. That really gets me excited. And that's what sustainability means to me. It means designing an energy delivery system that not only meets the needs of customers today, but will meet the needs of customers in the future.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Great. You bring to the Commission not only state regulatory experience as both Commissioner and Chairman of the District of Columbia Public Service Commission, but also your energy law experience at NERC and in private practice. How do you think these experiences will influence you as you begin your service at FERC?

**Commissioner Phillips:** You know, throughout my legal career I've sort of gravitated toward energy reliability issues. Again, it's the prism through which I see many of the problems that face our industry. It's what drove me in much of my work at the D.C. Public Service Commission, including my emphasis on grid modernization. So I understand the physical and cybersecurity threats that we face as a nation. Just look at the past 10 years – the Metcalf incident, Colonial Pipeline, Winter Storm Uri in Texas, wildfires in the West. I could go on. So, resilience is so very important to me. But I also remain sensitive to the impact that our decisions have on consumers, customers. I'm ever mindful of the cost impact on end-users, and I'm not just saying residential customers. Large industrial customers, everyone who depends on the system. And diversity in our legal profession: Critically important, especially in energy. That's something I've always focused on, and I hope to continue to focus on it at FERC.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** You've been at the Commission now for a few months. Has anything surprised you as you've made your transition to FERC?

**Commissioner Phillips:** You know, my new colleagues have surprised me – in a good way. You read the trade press, you kind of get a caricature in your mind about people. And you know, that doesn't always line up with reality. That's the case here. I believe every Commissioner is extremely thoughtful. I believe everybody wants what's best for our country. And also I'll say something about FERC staff. It really is a family, it feels like a family. From the onboarding process to the individual office briefings, I'm deeply impressed by the staff and their commitment to the mission.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** And final question. What's one thing that people don't know about you?

**Commissioner Phillips:** You know, my wife would tell you that this isn't a good thing, but I believe it's for a good reason. I'm a bit of a night owl. I do my best work, my best thinking, after midnight. But part of the reason why that is is that when my kids get home from school – I have a seven-year-old boy, a 10-year-old daughter – and when they get home, I really try to spend as much time with them as I can. You know, we're doing homework, you know, we're watching TV, we're trying to just, you know, be silly. And then I turn my attention back to my work usually. And I'm up late, oftentimes. So that's one thing people don't know about me.

**Tamara Young-Allen:** Thank you so much, Commissioner Phillips, for joining us today. And thank you, listeners, for joining us. We hope you join us the next time on Open Access.

**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

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