

## ENERGY POLICY

### Manchin cites climate change for FERC flip

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Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) voted against Bernard McNamee for a seat on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. C-SPAN

West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin withdrew support for a controversial Federal Energy Regulatory Commission nominee last evening over concerns President Trump's pick wasn't serious enough about climate.

Manchin's change of heart — compared with his support of FERC nominee Bernard McNamee in committee — comes amid a series of environmental group complaints against the coal-state lawmaker ([Greenwire](#), Nov. 27). They say he should not take over as ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee should Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) cede her position (see [related story](#)).

According to Manchin, his position on the nomination changed after he viewed a video that emerged last month from a speech McNamee gave during a Texas Public Policy Foundation event in February. It showed the current executive director of the Department of Energy's Office of Policy criticizing the deployment of renewable energy and environmental groups' campaigns to enact policy to combat climate change ([E&E News PM](#), Nov. 20).

Even though the video had surfaced before the committee vote, Manchin said last night he had not seen it before supporting McNamee.

"Climate change is real, humans have made a significant impact, and we have the responsibility and capability to address it urgently," Manchin said in a statement yesterday.

"I also continue to believe that science and technology will be critical to ensuring that the United States continues towards a clean energy economy, but we can't make progress if our public officials deny that a problem even exists."

Manchin added, "I would hope that Mr. McNamee will be open to considering the impacts of climate change and incorporates these considerations into his decision-making at FERC."

Manchin's climate change embrace caught at least some Capitol Hill watchers by surprise. The West Virginia Democrat notoriously fired a gun at the 2010 failed cap-and-trade legislation in a campaign ad in the same year, arguing the legislation "was not good for West Virginia."

Those previous stunts, along with his other support to bolster his home state's coal industry, have caused unease with some Democrats that Manchin would not take the threat of climate change serious enough as the top Democratic member of the committee with oversight of the nation's electric grid — one of the country's largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

Manchin has in the past expressed support for science blaming humans for climate change, but he has also railed against people who deny that fossil fuels will continue to have a role.

Washington Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee — a rumored 2020 presidential hopeful — said yesterday he was launching a petition to stop Manchin's ascension.

Earlier this week, climate action group Sunrise Movement held a protest outside Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's (D-N.Y.) New York City office ([E&E News PM](#), Dec. 3).

To Cantwell and other Senate Democrats, Manchin's "no" vote did not catch them off-guard, nor did his embrace of climate change.

"I think the video had a big impact on people," Cantwell told reporters. "We've had a tipping point with the California fires and that [climate] report. I think people are like, 'Wait a minute, this is costing us lives,' and to have somebody who is just like, 'No, it doesn't happen,' I think, is beyond the pale for a lot of people."

Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), who ranks above Manchin in ENR seniority but has repeatedly said she would stay as the Agriculture Committee's top Democrat, said she remained comfortable with Manchin.

"I think that Joe understands the difference between representing your state as a member and representing your caucus as a ranking member," Stabenow told reporters. "So I think he has a larger responsibility. At this point if he is next up in seniority, then I think that's the way that process works."

Regardless, Manchin's flipped vote did not have an effect on the progress of the McNamee confirmation. Republicans were able to join together to invoke cloture on the nominee 50-49 ([E&E News PM](#), Dec. 5).

Democrats opposed the vote, citing McNamee's previous work to help DOE's failed coal and nuclear economic lifeline policy proposal.

That vote total is likely to remain the same during the anticipated final vote today, according to ENR Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski.

The Alaskan Republican told E&E News yesterday that Manchin had informed her of his new stance on the bus ride back to the Capitol from the funeral services for former President George H.W. Bush.

"I assume that based on our conversation it was going to be the same," Murkowski said on Manchin's vote. "[But] we all know around here that we shouldn't make assumptions."

*Reporters Geof Koss, Kellie Lunney and Nick Sobczyk contributed.*

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