

Last Full-Time Member of TVA Board Departs

The first female director and lone Democrat board member of TVA left the federal agency Monday, May 19th. Skila Harris, a Bowling Green, Ky., native who served as a TVA director since November 1999, attended the May board meeting in Florence, Ala., and then resigned her \$48,000-a-year post on the part-time TVA board.

Ms. Harris, a former U.S. Department of Energy manager who was appointed to the TVA board by President Bill Clinton, was the first woman to serve as a director in the agency's 75-year history. Following the TVA board meeting in April, Ms. Harris said she would give up her job once her current nine-year term expires, even though she could stay on the board until the president appoints a new member or the current congressional term ends in December.

With Ms. Harris' departure, the TVA board will have only six of the nine members who were designated for the board under a governing change adopted by Congress nearly four years ago. Two other Bush appointees to the board – Susan Richardson Williams and Bishop William Graves are awaiting Senate approval of an additional term. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat, has blocked a Senate floor vote on the nominations because he objects to what he claims could be an all Republican board for TVA.

Ms. Harris is the last of those who once served on the three member, full-time board that governed TVA from its inception in 1933 until the new board structure began operating in March 2006.

For her part, Ms. Harris said last month she does not think the new board appointed by President Bush has been unduly partisan, even though all of those appointed under the new structure were campaign workers or supporters of Bush's presidential campaign. But Ms. Harris said she would have preferred that some Democrats be named to the new nine-member, part-time board.

“It was always my preference to have this board treated like many other boards with some type of designation of its partisan makeup,” she said last month in an interview with the Chattanooga Times Free Press. “But clearly, they didn't choose to take that route. But I have not had any issue of partisanship on this board so my experience has been good. I will leave it to members of the Senate to determine what political party the person comes from who fills my seat.”

Prior to joining TVA, Harris was executive director of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board under Energy Secretaries Bill Richardson and Federico Pena. She worked at DOE from 1979 to 1980 on the program that preceded creation of the U.S. Synthetic Fuels Corp., and then joined the Synthetic Fuels Corp. as a project officer until 1986. From 1993 to 1997 she served as special assistant to Vice President Al Gore and chief of staff to Tipper Gore. Harris now lives in Washington, D.C.