

Confirming Votes for TVA Directors Expected

More than a year and a half after his election, President Barack Obama finally should be able to put his mark on the board of the largest government utility. U.S. Senator Thad Cochran, R-Mississippi has now agreed to lift his hold on the confirmation of four nominees made last year by the Obama White House to the board of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The Senate is expected to ratify the appointments of four new TVA directors to restore the nine-member board to full strength by the end of May.

Senator Cochran held up confirmation of the TVA nominees to protest the lack of any Mississippi representation on the policy-making panel. Since Columbus, Mississippi, businessman and Republican donor Don DePriest left a year ago, TVA's board has been composed of members from Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky and Georgia -- four of the biggest states served in TVA's seven-state region. "Senator Cochran was disappointed that a Mississippian was not included among the new nominees for service as members of TVA board," Chris Gallegos, press secretary for Senator Cochran said, "he is, however, removing his hold on those who were nominated and believes our state's interests will be respected by the new board."

Last year, President Obama nominated three Democrats to the TVA board -- Middle Tennessee State University professor Barbara Haskew, Georgia Tech professor Mary Brown and Oak Ridge lawyer Neil McBride -- and renominated former TVA chairman and Republican businessman Bill Sansom of Knoxville.

The TVA nominations were among 70 initially delayed in February by holds on their confirmation from Senator Richard Shelby, R-Alabama, who objected to a White House plan not to build an Air Force refueling tanker and an FBI explosives center in Alabama.

The four TVA nominees were subsequently endorsed in a unanimous voice vote in early March by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and Senator Shelby lifted his hold. But then Senator Cochran apparently put a hold on ratifying the TVA nominations by the full Senate.

Senate holds usually are secret, but Senator Cochran's office acknowledged the Mississippi Republican had held up the Senate vote when questioned by the Chattanooga Times Free Press. Senator Lamar Alexander, R-Tennessee, who has headed the TVA Congressional Caucus, talked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to broker a deal to get the new TVA nominees confirmed.

The TVA board now has only the bare number of directors required to constitute a quorum for any significant policy decision. On May 18th, as TVA celebrated its 76th anniversary, the term of TVA Director Howard Thraikill ended. Mr. Thraikill may continue to serve on the TVA board through the end of the year or until his successor is named.

Last month, with a limited board membership, TVA put off a planned decision on the future of its Bellefonte Nuclear Plant. Environmentalists say they don't want the utility to move ahead with other new power plants until a new board is in place.

"These secret holds by senators obstruct the process and are largely used for these kinds of petty political purposes," said Stephen Smith, executive director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy and a former Democratic congressional candidate in Knoxville. "It's outrageous that these four people (nominated for the TVA board) can't help provide the help that this agency desperately needs before it makes some critical decisions for our energy future. "Mississippi shouldn't be holding up the rest of the valley and keeping the administration from moving their people forward while they whine about getting an appointment on the board," he said.

TVA Nominees:

- **Barbara S. Haskew:** A professor of economics at Middle Tennessee State University, she lives on Raccoon Mountain near Chattanooga and headed TVA's rate design group for eight years.
- **Marilyn A. Brown:** A Georgia Tech professor since 2006, she previously worked for Oak ridge National Laboratory for 22 years and was a founding board chairwoman for the southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance.
- **Neil G. McBride:** An Oak Ridge, Tennessee resident, he is general council for the legal Aid Society of Middle TN and the Cumberland's.
- **William B. Sansom:** A Knoxville businessman, he has previously served as TVA chairman.