

Accountable.US Case Study: The Nomination Of Maria Robinson

SUMMARY: Maria Robinson was nominated by President Biden to serve as the Assistant Secretary of Energy (Office of Electricity) within the Department of Energy on October 4th, 2021. Robinson is an adopted Korean-American who was elected to the Massachusetts State House in 2018, and went on to win reelection in 2020. Prior to her time in the Legislature, Robinson worked in numerous energy-related positions and led programs for Advance Energy Economy and the Massachusetts Clean Power Plan campaign, in addition to working as a renewable energy consultant for Navigant Consulting.

Robinson’s nomination did not garner much press coverage, primarily local Massachusetts papers, but it was received well from stakeholders in the energy industry as well as Democrats supporting Robinson’s unique identity in the nomination process.

Nevertheless, Robinson’s nomination was drawn out as procedural rules required the nomination be reintroduced after the Senate did not act in 2021. When hearings finally came in February 2022, Republican Senator James Lankford accused Robinson of being “publicly against American energy” and attributed pro-Russian sentiments to Robinson because of a Russian oil shipment to Boston. Despite these attacks, the hearings mainly focused on the nation’s energy grid reliability. In a Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources confirmation hearing on March 8th, 2022, Robinson’s nomination was delayed further after the Democrats lost quorum to push Robinson through committee (the previous four nominees were all voted on that day). Senator John Barrasso said he planned to oppose Robinson in committee because of “her focus on renewable energy,” which doomed any hopes of Robinson getting through without all required Democratic votes that day.

On May 3rd, 2022, the Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources failed to report Robinson out favorably due to a 10-10 split along party lines. The next day, Senator Mike Lee questioned Energy Secretary Granholm in a budget hearing and tried to get Granholm to say on the record that Robinson’s nomination should be withdrawn. Secretary Granholm remained supportive of Maria Robinson’s nomination. Despite this continued support, Robinson remained in committee as Democrats failed to obtain enough in-person votes to push her out of committee (Senate rules ascribe more power to in-person votes).

On June 8th, 2022, President Biden withdrew Maria Robinson’s nomination – nearly 250 days after her initial introduction to the Senate. Robinson had previously given up her seat in the MA State Legislature to pursue this nomination and her seat has been all but redistricted out of existence.

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NOMINATION TIMELINE

Maria Robinson’s Nomination To Assistant Secretary Of Energy Within The Department Of Energy Was Delayed Multiple Times, And Came To An End Nearly 250 Days After She Was Initially Nominated When Biden Withdrew The Nomination

In October 2021, Massachusetts State Representative Maria Robinson was nominated as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of Energy for Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability within the Department of Energy by President Biden. Robinson’s nomination was held up in a split committee, and eventually withdrawn for fears of losing the vote. Normally, a nominee of the ruling party can be pushed out of committee in a split vote, but due to a Senate rule granting more power to in-person votes, Robinson’s nomination was not eligible for this path and duly withdrawn in June, 248 days after her initial nomination.

Status	Date Of Nomination	Date Of Hearing	Date Of Withdrawal	Days From Nomination To Hearing	Days From Hearing To Withdrawal	Days From Nomination To Withdrawal
Withdrawn	10/4/21	2/8/22	6/8/22	127	121	248
DOE Average (As Of 1/14/22)				50.12	53	86
DIFFERENCE				Received a hearing 77 days later than an average DOE nominee	Withdrawn 68 later than average DOE nomination processes lasts	Withdrawn 162 later than average DOE nomination processes last

September 2021: President Biden Announces His Nomination Of Maria Robinson, A Korean-American Massachusetts State Representative With A Background In Energy Policy

Robinson's Nomination Was Withdrawn On June 8th, 248 Days After Her Initial Nomination. "Received message of withdrawal of nomination from the President." [Congress.gov, Accessed [6/30/22](#)]

- **The Energy And Natural Resources Committee Failed To Report Robinson's Nomination Favorably On May 3rd.** The Senate Committee On Energy And Natural Resources Failed To Report Robinson's Nomination Favorably. [Congress.gov, Accessed [6/30/22](#)]
- **Maria Robinson Was Nominated To Serve As Assistant Secretary of Energy for Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability Within The Department Of Energy On October 4th, 2021.** [Congress.gov, Accessed [5/23/22](#)]
- **President Biden Announced Maria Robinson's Nomination On September 22nd, 2021.** "Maria Robinson, Nominee for the Assistant Secretary in the Office of Electricity at the Department of Energy." [White House Press Release, [9/22/21](#)]

Maria Robinson Was Massachusetts' First Korean-American State Representative. "Robinson, Massachusetts' first Korean American state representative, had a degree in chemical engineering but was drawn into politics because of her concern for children in the foster care system. Robinson and her husband have adopted two foster children." [Mansfield News, via Nexis, [3/15/19](#)]

- **Robinson Was Elected To The Massachusetts House Of Representatives In 2018 And Won Reelection In 2020 Unopposed; Received 98% Of The Vote.** [Ballotpedia, Accessed [5/24/22](#)]
- **Maria Robinson Was Born In South Korea And Adopted To The United States.** "The adult adoptee participants of the tour came from a wide variety of professions and locations. They included Maria Robinson, a newly elected state representative from Massachusetts." [Asia Families, [7/21/19](#)]

Robinson Gave Up Her Seat In The Massachusetts State House For The Nomination, And Her Former District Was Redistricted Out Of Existence. "Robinson is not a candidate for reelection this year and her current district was more or less erased by the redistricting process. If she were to run for a House seat again from her current address, it would be in the 7th Middlesex District that Rep. Jack Patrick Lewis represents and is seeking reelection to." [Worcester Business Journal, [6/15/22](#)]

Robinson's Background Is Focused On The Energy Sector. "Previously, she led Advanced Energy Economy's program on wholesale markets, including engagement at FERC and the regional transmission organizations. Prior to that, [she led] the organization's state Clean Power Plan campaign, which covered over two dozen states across the country. [...] Maria was employed by Navigant Consulting in the renewable energy and energy efficiency practices, supporting the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in analyzing and procuring contractors for statewide renewable energy and energy efficiency projects." [MA Legislature, Accessed [5/24/22](#)]

INITIAL REACTION TO NOMINATION

Robinson's Nomination Was Not Widely Covered By National Outlets, Though Local Massachusetts Papers Highlighted Her Nomination And Background, As Did Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm

MetroWest Daily News **Headline: "Robinson 'Humbled' At Prospect Of Joining Biden; State Rep Offers Policy Experience, Tech Savvy."** "A chemical engineer and public official, state Rep. Maria Robinson hopes to use both her policy experience and tech savvy to help bring in new ideas, should her nomination be successful to become assistant secretary for the Office of Electricity in the Biden administration's Department of Energy." [MetroWest Daily News, via Nexis, [10/14/21](#)]

Secretary Of Energy Jennifer Granholm: “I Am Grateful To President Biden For Nominating Maria Robinson To Serve As DOE’s Assistant Secretary In The Office Of Electricity.” “This office’s work to expand and modernize our electric grid, including our transmission system, is critical to helping us confront the climate crisis and create a clean energy economy that works for everyone. Maria has been leading the charge for clean energy in Massachusetts, and her political smarts and technical expertise will help us turn President Biden’s goal of 100% clean electricity by 2035 into reality. I’m so glad that she’s willing to join the federal government and I look forward to her confirmation.” [Department of Energy, [9/23/21](#)]

ROBINSON’S HEARING FEATURED BASELESS ATTACKS

Maria Robinson’s Hearings Primarily Focused On Grid Resiliency, But Republican Senators Did Not Skip An Opportunity For Baseless Attacks

Energy Central **Headline: “Robinson Says Grid Reliability Is Top Concern.”** “Robinson was nominated in September by President Joe Biden to serve as an assistant secretary of energy in the Office of Electricity. She said during her testimony that she trusts “America’s ability to solve problems through technological development with smart investments and well-designed policies,” including achieving the Biden administration’s goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and “maintaining a reliable, resilient grid that can withstand the ever-increasing amount of catastrophic weather-induced events.” [MetroWest Daily News, [2/10/22](#)]

Senator Lankford Baselessly Attributed Pro-Russian Sentiments To Maria Robinson

Sen. Lankford Said Robinson Was “Publicly Against American Energy” In A Press Release. “Robinson’s views, if confirmed, may actually lead to increased emissions and jeopardize the energy reliability we depend on every day. Robinson has vocally opposed natural gas pipelines, despite a reliance on dirtier home heating oil in the northeast US. Robinson also supports speedy adoption of electric vehicles and eliminating the use of natural gas, which will further strain our power grid.” [Senator Lankford News Room, [2/10/22](#)]

Sen. Lankford Attributed Pro-Russian Sentiments To Robinson Because She Did Not Oppose Letting Natural Gas Imports Go To Boston Harbor. “Mrs. Robinson is from Massachusetts, vocally opposed to natural gas pipelines coming into new England. [...] she doesn’t want natural gas pipelines coming in, but she didn’t seem to oppose when a Russian tanker pulled in and offloaded natural gas into Boston Harbor. So literally buying natural gas from the Russians, not from the United States, didn’t seem to be an issue.” [Senator Lankford News Room, [2/10/22](#)]

- **Sixty Percent Of The Nation’s Liquefied Natural Gas Was Imported Through Boston Harbor In 2020.** “...banning all Russian energy imports — a move that could put eyes on Massachusetts, home to the Everett Marine Terminal on Boston Harbor, where 60% of the nation’s liquefied natural gas was imported in 2020, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.” [Boston Herald, [3/5/22](#)]

A Senate Rule Giving More Power To In-Person Votes Caused Robinson’s Nomination To Stall In Committee

After The Hearings, A Procedural Rule Delayed Democrats’ Ability To Push Robinson Through Along Party Lines

The Senate Lost Quorum For Robinson’s Vote, After Successfully Having It For The Prior Four Votes That Day. “State Representative Maria Robinson’s nomination to be an Assistant Secretary of Energy for the

Office of Electricity was not voted on during a Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources confirmation hearing today, March 8. According to Committee Chair Senator Joe Manchin, a Democrat from Virginia, there was not a quorum present to vote on Rep. Robinson's nomination. There was a quorum for the first four votes, but not for Framingham State Rep. Robinson's vote, the fifth and final vote." [Framingham Source, [3/8/22](#)]

MetroWest Daily News Headline: "Dems Appear To Lack Vote In Face Of GOP Opposition To Maria Robinson Confirmation." "Rather than risk defeat, a U.S. Senate panel on Tuesday postponed its scheduled vote on Robinson's nomination to be assistant secretary in the Office of Electricity." [MetroWest Daily News, [3/8/22](#)]

- **Proxy Voting Rules Left Democrats One Vote Short Of Pushing Robinson's Nomination Through In March 2022.** "Nine of the committee's 10 Democrats were physically present at the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources meeting to consider a slate of President Joe Biden's nominations, with Sanders — an independent who caucuses with Democrats — instead voting by proxy. Under committee rules that ascribe more power to in-person votes, that left the chair, Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, one vote short of what he needed to muscle Robinson's nomination through..." [MetroWest Daily News, [3/8/22](#)]
- **Senator Barrasso Announced He Planned To Oppose Robinson's Nomination "Because Of Her Focus On Renewable Energy Sources."** "Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, who serves as the ranking minority member of the committee, said at the start of the meeting that he planned to oppose the Framingham Democrat because of her focus on renewable energy sources." [MetroWest Daily News, [3/8/22](#)]

...The Delay Added Another Two Months Onto Robinson's Already Delayed Nomination Timeline

MetroWest Daily News Headline: "U.S. Senate Committee Split Along Party Lines On Maria Robinson's Nomination." "A U.S. Senate committee split evenly along party lines Tuesday on whether to advance Framingham state Rep. Maria Robinson's bid for a federal energy job, but because Democrats wield control in Washington, she remains in the running to secure approval. Nearly two months after U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin delayed the original vote to avoid risking defeat, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources voted 10-10 on Robinson's nomination to serve as assistant secretary of energy in the Office of Electricity." [MetroWest Daily News, [5/3/22](#)]

The Day After Robinson's Vote In Committee, Senator Mike Lee Questioned Energy Secretary Granholm In A Budget Hearing And Tried To Get Her To Withdraw Support For Robinson

Senator Mike Lee Questioned Secretary Granholm Over Maria Robinson's Views And Tried To Get Granholm To Advise That Robinson's Nomination Be Withdrawn. "MIKE LEE : Right. Now, it -- it is of course the -- the statutory purpose of the Department of Energy to provide quote, "An adequate and reliable supply of energy at the lowest reasonable cost." So I -- I believe it's -- it's clear that Ms. Robinson's views are not compatible with that mission. [...] I -- I assume you would advise that the nomination be withdrawn? JENNIFER GRANHOLM: No." [Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Budget Hearings, via Nexis, [5/4/22](#)]

PRESIDENT BIDEN WITHDREW ROBINSON'S NOMINATION

After Months of Stalling, President Biden Withdrew Robinson's Nomination In June 2022, Nearly 250 Days After Her Initial Nomination

Robinson's Nomination Was Withdrawn On June 8th, 2022. "WITHDRAWAL SENT TO THE SENATE: Maria Duaine Robinson, of Massachusetts, to be an Assistant Secretary of Energy (Office of Electricity), vice Bruce J. Walker, which was sent to the Senate on January 4, 2022." [White House Press Release, [6/8/22](#)]

Metro West Daily News: Biden Withdraws Nomination Of Framingham Rep For Federal Energy Post. "The move, which came last week, comes after Robinson's appointment stalled when the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources split along party lines in early May on whether to advance the nomination." [MetroWest Daily News, [6/16/22](#)]

Robinson's Nomination Stalled In Committee In March Due To A Senate Rule Giving In-Person Votes More Power. "At that March 8 meeting, all nine of the committee's Democrats were physically present to consider a slate of Biden's nominations, with Sanders — an independent who caucuses with Democrats — instead voting by proxy. Committee rules ascribe more power to in-person votes, which left Manchin one vote short of what he needed to muscle Robinson's nomination through if the panel's 10 Republicans lined up in unanimous opposition." [MetroWest Daily News, [6/16/22](#)]

...Though Robinson's Nomination Still Had A Chance At Passing Until Biden's Withdrawal. "Until Biden's withdrawal, Robinson remained in the running to secure approval because of the slim Democratic majority in the Senate. U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer could have moved to discharge Robinson's nomination from committee and bring it up for a full Senate confirmation vote." [MetroWest Daily News, [6/16/22](#)]

Chair Of The Energy And Natural Resources Committee Joe Manchin Delayed Robinson's Vote To Avoid A Defeat In Committee. "Sen. Joe Manchin delayed the first planned vote on Robinson to avoid risking defeat and the panel then voted 10-10 last month, leaving her nomination in limbo." [WWLP, [6/15/22](#)]