

### Chatterjee for Va. governor?

[Arianna Skibell](#) and [Timothy Cama](#), E&E News reporters

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Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Chairman Neil Chatterjee. FERC

Over the weekend, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Chairman Neil Chatterjee created a Facebook group pitching his "hypothetical" run for Virginia governor. Now the nation's top energy regulator says he was just "playing around."

"It's amazing that people are taking this so seriously," he told E&E News. "But knowing D.C., you can never just joke around."

Still, Chatterjee did not categorically rule it out.

"I have spent basically my entire professional career in public service," he said. "So when my term is up at the commission, continuing to serve the public in some way would certainly be something that I would consider. But that could take many forms beyond simply running for office."

Virginia's primary is set for June 8, 2021. And while Chatterjee's term is up in June 2021, he would not be legally permitted to campaign for political office while retaining his post as a government employee, meaning he would have to step down early as chairman. He has said he intends to finish out his term.

Since Chatterjee's Facebook account created the public group, titled "**Hypothetical: Draft Neil Chatterjee for Virginia Governor 2021**," on Saturday, over 200 people have joined, posting words of encouragement.

Melody Diegor Caprio wrote, "let me know how I can hypothetically help!" and Alexis Semanchuk commented, "Why is this hypothetical? (This question is not rhetorical.)"

Another group member, Gabriel Czirr, asked if this meant the chairman would not be a lieutenant governor candidate for Kentucky in 2023.

"Love love love Kentucky. But have been living in Virginia for almost 20 years," Chatterjee replied.

Chatterjee said that while he's "very grateful and touched" by the kind and encouraging comments from friends, he "cannot stress enough" that he was just playing around.

"A decision like that, so many factors would go into considering even exploring it, which would require serious focus and energy that I just don't have right now," he said. "I've got way too much on my plate with my responsibilities at the commission."

The Republican chairman has garnered a reputation at FERC for pushing up against states' ability to choose their own energy mix. Virginia recently became the first state in the South to adopt a net-zero carbon goal, knocking heads with FERC's emphasis on a market-based approach to electricity.

In a 2018 interview with E&E News, Chatterjee acknowledged the tension he feels between the traditional conservative pro-states' rights stance and his preference for market capitalism.

"This is a really, really tough one for me," said Chatterjee, who has previously worked as a policy adviser on energy to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). "I'm a firm believer in states' rights, in local governments being able to make decisions about what their energy futures look like. But I also believe in markets, the efficiencies and values and benefits of markets" (*[Greenwire](#)*, July 13, 2018).

Environmental advocates have criticized FERC for hampering states' ability to integrate renewable energy, which they say is a critical component in fighting the devastating impacts of climate change. Chatterjee's commission has also faced pushback on the number of natural gas infrastructure projects it permits.

Michael Town, executive director of the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, said Virginians have made it clear they want more clean energy, not less.

"It would be the best thing for Virginia for him to step down from his position at FERC so he could focus on running a failed campaign for governor," he said of Chatterjee.

"It's a joke. He would lose in Virginia. We're not going to fall for a Trump Lite for governor, especially with a background working for Mitch McConnell."