

# OPINION

## The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

"Ask yourself one question. 'Is it right?' Then do what you believe is best for your town, your state and your country."  
— James M. Cox, founder, Cox Enterprises

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# Georgia well-placed for surging energy use

State's utilities ready thanks to strategic investments, a diverse energy mix, forward-thinking outlooks.

By **Stephen Lawson**

If you're like me, when you flip on your light switch or stop at a red light, you don't think about the thousands of people and decisions as well as the planning that made that possible.

We often take our utilities and energy supply for granted. But having a strong, reliable energy grid to meet the demands of a state with more than 11 million people doesn't happen by accident. It's the result of long-range planning, strategic investments, strong policy and a commitment to Georgia's future. Even with our state's rapid growth, we are well-positioned to meet rising energy demands in the next decade and beyond.

In January, Georgia Power presented its Integrated Resource Plan to the Public Service Commission — a road map for how it will provide the energy Georgia needs over the next decade and beyond. While it may sound boring, it's actually really important for the future energy needs of our state: If you don't have a road map, you have no idea where you're going — and you'll probably end up lost. The IRP outlined plans to meet a whopping 50% increase in electricity demand by 2035, driven largely by the rapid expansion of data centers, which are expected to account for more than 80% of new large-customer electricity demand.

But the good news is this: Through proactive strategic investments, diverse energy mix, forward-thinking long-range outlooks and proven reliability, our state's utility providers have built the capacity and capability to deliver energy for our state's growing needs.

Strategic investments over the past two decades have been instrumental in ensuring Georgia's energy grid remains strong and resilient. From modernizing aging infrastructure to upgrading transmission and distribution networks, these investments have allowed our utilities to better anticipate and mitigate potential challenges before they arise. Additionally, a continued commitment to prioritizing renewable energy projects, smart grid technologies and energy storage solutions has allowed our state to stay ahead of the curve, support emerging trends and foster economic growth — all while maintaining reliability and affordability for consumers. As part of the IRP, Georgia Power has proposed the development of 1,100 megawatts of solar and battery storage systems to diversify energy sources and enhance grid resilience. The plan also includes a 10-year transmission strategy, adding more than 1,000 miles of new transmission lines to improve system efficiency and ensure energy reliability across the state.



The QTS Atlanta Data Center has its own Georgia Power substations. Georgia Power has outlined plans to meet a 50% jump in power demand by 2035, driven largely by rapid expansion of data centers, expected to account for over 80% of new large-customer power demand. HYOSUB SHIN/AJC 2022

Just like a well-balanced retirement portfolio, a diverse mix of energy sources is key to staying resilient, adaptable and efficient. Georgia is blessed to have an "all of the above" strategy when it comes to our energy sources, including nuclear, natural gas, solar and hydropower to meet growing demand and increase sustainability. Nuclear power continues to play a crucial role in delivering consistent base-load electricity, while solar and other renewables help offset peak demand and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Georgia Power's IRP also emphasized increased utilization of natural gas and enhancements to nuclear power outputs, including extended power uprates at Plants Hatch and Vogtle, which will add 112 megawatts of carbon-free energy. Additionally, upgrades at Plant McIntosh are expected to contribute an additional 268 megawatts of capacity — and combined with Plants Bowen and Scherer will sustain hundreds of high-quality, good paying jobs while generating hundreds of millions in tax revenues for local communities and the state.

Georgia has a history of planning ahead to stay on top of changing energy needs — and the recent IRP is no different. By looking at future energy demands, using new technology and preparing for trends like more electric vehicles and decentralized power grids, the state's utilities are making sure the energy system remains reliable. Careful forecasting and data-driven decisions have helped Georgia Power and other providers stay ahead and keep delivering for customers. As part of this effort, the IRP introduces new programs, including a solar-plus-storage option for homes and small businesses and a demand response program for large customers, offering smart solutions for evolving energy needs.

Even amid natural disasters, our energy grid has proved reliable. Over the past year, our energy infrastructure was tested like never before. In September, Hurricane Helene knocked down more than 8,000 power poles and damaged 4,500 transformers. In December, a winter storm hit metro Atlanta, weighing down trees and damaging power lines. But in both cases, Georgia Power and other utility providers swiftly restored power, deploying crews, using advanced grid-monitoring technology and coordinating with emergency management agencies to quickly get customers back up and running. And while there is still a long way on the road to the larger recovery efforts, this type of rapid response was only possible due to long-term planning, emergency preparedness and significant grid investments.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Data centers' energy demand continues to rise, with estimates showing they'll account for 80% of large-use customers by 2037. To make sure they are paying their fair share and aren't driving up costs for regular customers, the Georgia Public Service Commission recently approved new rules requiring large electricity users to commit to longer contracts and higher rates, helping keep energy rates stable for homes and small businesses. Even still, other challenges such as natural disasters, workforce shortages and cybersecurity threats will continue to test the grid, and being nimble, responsive and staying ahead of the curve will be more important than ever.

Georgia's utilities are prepared for the future. Through strategic foresight, strong leadership and continued investment, they are not just keeping up with energy demand — they are leading the way in resilience, sustainability and innovation. In a vibrant, growing and booming state, our energy supply is prepared to successfully propel our state into the next generation and beyond.

Stephen Lawson is a communications professional and principal at Dentons, a global professional services firm. His clients include Fortune 500 companies, trade associations and issue advocacy organizations. He serves as an adviser to House Speaker Jon Burns and has previously worked for U.S. Sen. Kelly Loeffler and Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, as well as Govs. Rick Scott and Ron DeSantis in Florida.

## Steve Breen

### SUCKER PUNCH



CREATORS SYNDICATE

#### Letters to the editor

Letters should be no longer than 200 words and include a daytime phone number for verification. Letters will be edited for fact, length, clarity, style and tone and may be published in print and digital formats. Emailed submissions are strongly preferred, with letters in the body of the email. Please do not send attachments. The volume of submissions from us from acknowledging the receipt of letters. Please email letters to [letters@ajc.com](mailto:letters@ajc.com).

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#### READERS WRITE

#### Fleeing vehicles could endanger others

The AJC has again maligned the Georgia State Patrol for their pursuits of drivers attempting to escape. ("GSP pursuit culture puts public at risk," March 3).

Much was made of comparisons and contrasts to other police agencies. The discussion was heavy about damages incurred from those pursuits. However, this treatment of the subject ignores the potentials which those pursuits addressed. Other vehicles along the path of fleeing drivers also frequently face dangers from that driving.

To not pursue is a judgment call by an officer at the time. Ignoring a fleeing driver is often as dangerous as pursuing that fleeing driver. Being forced off a road by a speeder can also kill. Not enforcing laws encourages more disregard of laws. Police are hired "to protect and defend."

We need better respect for laws by all drivers to bring better safety for all people on (or near) our road system.

**TOM STREETS, ATLANTA**

#### Take a photo, stop the chase

It's time for the GSP to use common sense. No one should be engaged in a high-speed pursuit over a minor traffic violation.

Instead, law enforcement should chase only long enough to get the tag and possibly photograph the driver. At that point, the car is marked to be stopped and impounded anywhere it's found. Getting the car back would then be a lengthy and expensive process. The driver and or owner is punished, and no one has to die.

**JAKE DAVENPORT, COLLEGE PARK**

#### Musk wreaks havoc for his benefit

With our government being quickly and arbitrarily destroyed from within, a la Project 2025, I must sound the alarm. The Republicans and MAGAites are standing by, allowing it to happen; thus, we ordinary citizens must stand in the breach. This letter is one citizen's duty to defend our nation.

Dismantling our legal institutions and agencies (USAID, DOE, etc.) is neither efficient nor in keeping with uncovering fraud and abuse. Instead, it is closely aligned with the agencies that provide oversight for Elon Musk and his companies. He is not looking to Make America Great Again — he is seeking to stop that oversight and punish the agencies that dare to hold him accountable.

The decisions Musk and his team are making are wreaking havoc here and around the world. He is gleefully issuing arbitrary and confusing edicts to the employees of the federal government with the end result of destroying the safety nets and programs that the government provides its people. And, when government no longer provides for the common good of its citizens, the people are thrust into chaos, fear, instability and hopelessness.

Is this what you voted for, America? Wake up!

**VALERIE RANNEY, MARIETTA**