

Finally Some Good News on the Energy Front

By Commissioners Doug Everett and Tim Echols

Last month consumers got some great news: the “futures” price of natural gas declined to \$1.98 per 1,000 cubic feet—the lowest since the winter of 2002. So while gasoline has gone up 7 percent from this time last year, natural gas continues to drop in price, coming down almost 17 percent since last winter. This is great news for everyone.

First, lower natural gas prices are causing electricity prices to drop—and Georgia will see this as well most likely. Coal, traditionally the most inexpensive fuel to generate power, is being supplanted by cheap natural gas. This domestic glut of gas has been created by hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, as it is called. Assuming the Environmental Protection Agency doesn't get its claws on fracking, I think we can expect to see the price stay very low.

In Smyrna, Georgia Power is converting an older coal plant to natural gas. Plant McDonough, whose tall stacks can be seen from I-285, will be cleaner and more efficient than its coal-burning past. Plus, Atlanta's air quality improves and rate payers save money. It is a win-win situation for everyone.

Second, as two of the most outspoken Commissioners on the Georgia Public Service Commission touting the benefits of compressed natural gas as a transportation fuel, this is very good news. Pumps around Atlanta are selling CNG—as it is called—for around \$2.40 per gallon equivalent. This alternative fuel usage in most instances qualifies commuters for a free Peach Pass, and free tolls—and free use of all HOV lanes anywhere in the city at any time.

Fleets using CNG like Marta, UPS, Snapping Shoals EMC and others who have their own CNG pumps are saving even more. And now that the PSC has approved Atlanta Gas Light's CNG plan, consumers can lease a home-fueling appliance and pump it into their CNG car while they sleep in the convenience of their own garage.

The best news of all, though, is that natural gas drilling is happening in America, not Saudi Arabia. Jobs are being created not just in North Dakota and Texas, but even Georgia. Companies like PyraMax are producing tiny ceramic pellets from kaolin used in the fracking process.

When you factor in the fact that natural gas is clean, domestically produced, and now cheap, you have a trifecta for consumers where everyone wins.

Doug Everett and Tim Echols serve on the Georgia Public Service Commission. Reach them at www.psc.state.ga.us