

EPA grants higher energy costs, burdens

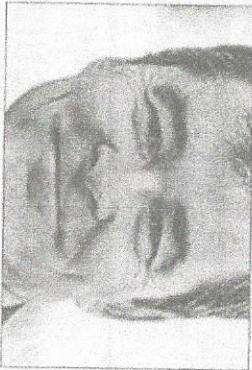
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By Tim Echols

Someone once told me people could get used to anything, and in America, I think we have grown numb in our reaction to orders from a strong, centralized government in Washington. It doesn't faze us. It simply is the way life is now.

President Barack Obama's recent release of the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan final rule has drawn praise from many corners, and those like me who would take issue with the rule and its presuppositions are said to be somehow as standing in the way of progress, even reckless.

I consider myself anything but environmentally reckless. My family owns three electric cars, put solar thermal on our house to heat our water and turn our air conditioning units off every summer day from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. in order to relieve pressure on the grid. We use E85 in our non-electric car, and I created the Alternative Fueled Vehicle Roadshow that travels the East Coast. My point is: I think the solution to our energy issues can be



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resolved here at home without federal intervention and without guilt from the White House.

But it is not just guilt — there's also a hammer. That hammer is the EPA — the infamous U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that churns out rules like the Varsity makes hotdogs. These rules are frequently challenged, but usually implemented by utilities, and paid for by ratepayers. Later, a court may overturn them after the money has been spent.

In the Clean Power Plan, the rule forces us to accelerate progress we would have made anyway. Think of it as upgrad-

ing your smartphone before the end of your contract period, resulting in a much higher fee. When it comes to Obama's EPA plan, prepare to multiply that times several billion dollars because it is your state's electric grid that the president is mandating be upgraded early.

Consider the progress Georgia has made in energy and environment protection:

- In 2009, the Georgia Public Service Commission approved the plan to construct two new nuclear power units currently under construction at Georgia Power's Plant Vogtle near Waynesboro. These units will produce no carbon emissions or other greenhouse gases for at least 60 years.

- Since 2011, working with the PSC, Georgia Power has increased its purchases of solar generation from almost nothing to approximately 1 gigawatt of electricity. If all of this solar was producing today, Georgia Power would have the fourth-largest solar portfolio in the nation.

- In 2013 the PSC approved the closing of 16 of Georgia

Power Company's coal and oil fired electric generating units, a decision that has already reduced carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases.

- In 2014 the PSC approved Georgia Power's purchase of 250 megawatts of wind power, another clean energy source, which produces no carbon or other greenhouse gases

- Georgia Power is in the process of adding 282 megawatts of homegrown, Georgia biomass capacity to our grid.

- Georgia Power, with the support of the PSC, has increased its demand-side power initiative and energy efficiency programs. Both of these programs have reduced power consumption, which in turn reduces greenhouse gases.

My point: If you are going fast in the right direction, as we are, do you need a federal mandate that drastically changes energy planning for the state as this rule does? Given that we are coming out of the Great Recession, does it make sense to burden our citizens with higher energy cost?

As we make new investments in solar, wind and other clean energy improvements, you, the ratepayers fund all of it, with interest. As one of our elected energy commissioners on the PSC, I take my job seriously: to keep energy rates low and reliability high for you and business interests.

We'll comply with this EPA mandate, but don't expect me to go quietly.

I think the solution to our energy issues can be resolved here at home without federal intervention and without guilt from the White House.