

## **One is the Loneliest Number—even in Politics**

Standing alone is never fun. But the voters elected me to stand up for them and be their voice no matter the consequences.

I was the lone dissenting vote at the Georgia Public Service Commission on March 20th in a precedent-setting case involving the closure of coal plants, local jobs, and outside contracts. This was a complicated vote because it involved closing two very old coal units in Putnam County near Lake Sinclair.

If you have ever been to Eatonton or Milledgeville, you know how important this power plant is to their local economy. In fact, Georgia Power is the largest taxpayer in Putnam County. Residents are proud of their new high school, and school officials recently gave me a tour of their solar array and other renewable projects they are developing on campus across from Rock Eagle, the 4H camp on US Highway 441.

My “no” vote was in part an effort to say “let’s try to keep these jobs in middle-Georgia.” Granted the vintage 1969 coal units at Plant Branch were old, inefficient, and hard to work on. But we are replacing that power with electricity from an Alabama plant in part. Upgrading the Georgia Power facility at Plant Branch would have preserved hundreds of local jobs and provided five years of construction jobs for plant upgrades—albeit at a cost.

In Georgia Power’s defense, something had to be done. Because of very strict federal and state regulations, older coal plants like Plant Branch are coming under greater scrutiny. More than a dozen coal units in Georgia will have to be either cleaned-up, closed, or switched to natural gas—and the price tag for this will probably be over \$3 billion. The vote the Commission made about Plant Branch will have to be made about others across our state. I offered an amendment to try to reduce the amount of unusable materials and supplies the company could recover. That amendment failed. In the end, I had to vote against the entire proposal.

Despite being on the losing side, there is a silver lining in this decision. One, if Georgia Power is not doing construction projects, they can’t go over budget. Leasing is sometimes better than buying—even with power plants. The last thing we need is cost overruns—especially with the nuclear plant well underway now. Second, the Commission amended the proposal to forego the required “additional sum” that ratepayers will owe Georgia Power until 2019 instead of 2015. State law requires that Georgia Power receive an additional sum whenever the Company procures long-term power purchase agreements. I tried to reduce the amount of the “additional sum,” but that amendment also failed.

There is no right and wrong when it comes to setting energy policy. It is a judgment call, and in our state voters elect five Public Service Commissioners to do that on their behalf. We try to look into the future, and put the infrastructure in place that will provide energy at the lowest cost while at the same time attract businesses and bring jobs to our state. It may seem like an easy job, but we need to hear from our fellow citizens in order to do our job well. Reach us at [www.psc.state.ga.us](http://www.psc.state.ga.us)

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