

then tells the PSC how those funds can be spent.

“We can use them to help poor people with their utility costs or to enhance gas opportunities in the state.”

Echols said he thinks the pump project falls under the latter, since switching to natural gas could eventually lead to lower emissions and costs for Georgia consumers.

The price of gas derived from crude oil could potentially rise as high as \$4 a gallon in the near future due to unrest in the Middle East, he said. By comparison, natural gas prices are \$1.92 per gallon.

Due to the fact that's it's lighter than air, Echols said, natural gas is also much more environmentally friendly.

“When you spill regular gas, you know you get it sitting on the ground for a while,” he said. “With compressed natural gas, since it's so light, it just instantly dissipates.”

He said the vehicles using natural gas are also more “green” than most electric cars due to their power source.

Noting that the majority of electricity in Georgia is derived from coal, he said electric vehicles here aren't as environmentally friendly as they would be in a state that draws most of its power from “cleaner” energy sources.

Echols said he's been encouraging companies that have large fleets of vehicles to retrofit them for compressed natural gas, which could save on fuel costs.

A graduate of the University of Georgia, Echols was elected to the PSC in November after 15 years in the nonprofit sector. He and his wife, Windy, have seven children and live in Winterville.