

The Augusta Chronicle

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Editorial: A nuclear 'kick in the gut'

State, federal officials must do all they can to save Vogtle project



OPINION-EDITORIAL

IN WAKE OF THE FEDERAL ATTACK, PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS CALLED AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF HIS TOP-LEVEL ADVISERS TO RAMP UP EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT NEW LEGISLATION TO ENSURE AMONGST OTHERS THE CHANGING CLIMATE TECHNOLOGY

Continuation of the editorial and other related articles

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What happens when you turn off the lights in the world's busiest airport?

Near chaos. Hundreds of canceled flights. Thousands of stranded travelers. Untold dashed plans.

Yet, as disruptive as Sunday's sudden power outage at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson was – and is, as airlines scramble to get back on schedule and passengers jostle for available seats at one of the most-booked times of the year – it's nothing compared to what will happen in the Augusta area if they pull the plug on Vogtle

nuclear plant construction Thursday.

On the heels of the bankruptcy this year of the general contractor's parent company, Toshiba, the Georgia Public Service Commission is set to essentially decide Thursday whether the building of nuclear units three and four should proceed – or not.

SEE ALSO

Jobs would vanish almost immediately if Vogtle expansion canceled
(<http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/2017-12-16/jobs-would-vanish-almost-immediately-if-vogtle-expansion-canceled>)

GOP tax measure offers no help to Plant Vogtle project
(<http://chronicle.augusta.com/business/2017-12-15/gop-tax-measure-offers-no-help-plant-vogtle-project>)

It seems inconceivable that they'd pull the plug this far and this much money into construction. But the same thing happened only this past July at the Toshiba/Westinghouse Electric Co. V.C. Summer plant near Jenkinsville, S.C. – with Toshiba citing \$9 billion in combined losses at the two projects and SCANA voting to abandon V.C. Summer.

What would happen if the Georgia PSC does that here? Our own Damon Cline chronicled the carnage Sunday:

| 6,000 construction jobs gone – as well as \$115 million in annual payroll

| rental homes, apartments and mobile home parks and campgrounds emptied out

| a noticeable exodus from restaurants and stores

“Orders from local wholesalers, industrial supply companies and equipment rental businesses would plummet.”

the loss of 800 high-paying permanent jobs (nuclear plant operators earn an average of \$91,170); the loss of over 500 ancillary jobs; and the loss of \$33 million in annual payroll

the loss of 700 impending new electrical jobs starting in March

“It will ripple through the economy,” says Ty Davenport, director of economic development for the county where V.C. Summer sits. “It was a kick in the gut here.”

With the ongoing explosion in cybersecurity jobs in the Augusta area, led by the Pentagon’s decision to station its Army Cyber Command at Fort Gordon here, the regional economy is more diverse than before and better positioned to take an economic hit.

And with 1980s-era Vogtle nuclear units 1 and 2 unaffected and already comprising the majority of Burke County’s tax digest at \$22.3 million, county Administrator Merv Waldrop says, “I don’t see it being the end of the world if they shut down.”

Perhaps not. But a nuclear kick in the gut. In addition, abandoning Vogtle 3 and 4 – especially after the shutdown of the V.C. Summer plant – would emit a black cloud over America’s engineering and energy image, not to mention our national pride.

Vogtle units 3 and 4 would be the first new commercial nuclear reactors in America in decades. Do we really want to pull the plug now?

Atlanta’s airport outage Sunday was a dark, stark reminder of our utter dependence on electric power.

Regardless of the massive hit to the regional economy, this project is monumentally important to Georgia, the Southeast and to the nation. It cannot be abandoned if the state and federal governments have yet to do everything in their power to save it.

Starting with the Georgia Public Service Commission on Thursday.