

Why Georgia Doesn't Need the Green New Deal by Tim Echols

Much has been made about the Green New Deal and hope for a national energy plan. I have pushed back against this proposal much the same way I resisted the “Clean Power Plan” from several years ago. Here’s why I am concerned.

First, our overall electricity prices are currently sitting at 15 percent below the national average, according to power company comparisons using Energy Information Administration data. Our competitive electricity prices have been good for both consumers and businesses.

Under our leadership, we are just less than three years away from starting up advanced technology nuclear units that together will reduce CO₂ by about 10 million metric tons per year! And when combined with the existing two units – the total will be 20 million tons per year. In fact, Vogtle is slated to become the largest nuclear station in the US.

The Green New Deal leaves nuclear out of the mix. In fact, it calls for a complete phase-out of nuclear energy in ten years. That is a mistake because nuclear plants allow for carbon-free uninterrupted baseload generation of electricity for possibly 80 years. This is especially important since we in Georgia have closed or fuel-switched over 4800 megawatts of coal-fired generation—plants that could run 24/7. In 2018, nuclear energy provided for over 56 percent of our nation’s emissions-free zero carbon electricity, according to Nuclear Energy Institute.

These actions coupled with significant environmental investments have yielded results. SO₂, NO_x, and mercury emissions are down over 90 percent and CO₂ emissions are down over 50 percent. Georgia’s Integrated Resource Planning, mandated by the 1991 Legislature, has helped us chart an orderly transition from a predominantly coal-based generation fleet to one of the most diverse fleets in the country including nuclear energy, natural gas, hydro, coal and massive amounts of solar.

When I was elected in 2010, we had virtually no solar energy on the grid. Today, Georgia is a national leader, and we have more solar on military bases than any other state does. We have created massive solar fields in Middle and South Georgia. Companies like Target, Walmart, Johnson & Johnson, and Google have participated in our forward-looking “commercial and industrial program” to help achieve their corporate renewable goals.

There is a reason that Georgia was named the top state to do business in by Site Selection magazine for a fifth straight year. We have competitive labor environments and leading workforce development programs, low taxes and utility costs, favorable regulatory environments, and a cooperative state government. And we have a Public Service Commission and investor-owned utilities, including our electric cooperatives and municipal utilities, who work hard to help businesses meet their energy and environmental goals.

The Green New Deal plans for a carbon tax and carbon regulation through a “cap and trade” program. The Green New Deal claims to make fossil fuel plants, including clean natural gas, irrelevant. The Green New Deal offers social and economic justice and security through 15 requirements—which space will not allow me to list. The Green New Deal prescribes national mobilization of our economy through 14 mega-expensive infrastructure and industrial projects. The Green New Deal will, in short, send energy prices spiraling upward in our state. An American Action Forum study found that nationally the Green New Deal could cost somewhere between \$51 and \$93 trillion over the next ten years.

Names like “Green New Deal” and “Clean Power Plan” sound harmless enough, but both of these massive federal programs steal power away from states and give it to bureaucrats in Washington D.C. and they raise prices in the process. They are both a raw deal for Georgians. No, thank you.

Echols is Vice-Chair of the Georgia Public Service Commission