



OPINION

Georgia will pay a high price for going along with Big Tech’s data center push

Eliminate tax breaks and ensure Big Tech pays the full burden of the speculative build-out of data centers.



(Illustration: Marcie LaCerte for the AJC)

By Amy Sharma – For The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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Regarding [“Georgia risks ‘best state to do business’ stature with data center bills,”](#) by Josh Levi of the Data Center Coalition, March 11, and [“Data center construction keeps](#)

[Georgia's economy going,](#)" by Bill Anderson of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Georgia, March 16.

I read with great interest these guest opinion columns in the AJC.

These groups are conflating two very separate issues: 1) welcoming innovation and 2) building enormous warehouses and almost doubling our power generation capacity.

These are not the same thing.

Welcoming innovation means investing in our innovation engine: a thriving business community, world-class universities and a talented workforce. This trifecta is what makes Georgia great.

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Building giant computing facilities and the corresponding power infrastructure means asking Georgians to shoulder the risks of speculative infrastructure built to serve the world's largest and richest corporations.

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The infrastructure to power the artificial intelligence economy and the actual AI economy do not need to be in the same place. In fact, the infrastructure is a fleeting need, traps us in debt and may hold us back.

Apply Gartner Hype Cycle to AI economy



Amy Sharma, Ph.D., is the executive director of Science for Georgia, a nonprofit organization focused on getting science out of the lab and into service of society. (Courtesy)

We used to put big, dirty, industry on the “wrong side of the tracks” because society decided some people’s lives were an acceptable price to pay for progress.

Subsidizing Big Tech’s data center buildout in Georgia is the same calculation, dressed up in a nicer suit. In this case, Big Tech has decided all of Georgia is the “wrong side of the tracks.”

For those of you old enough to remember the start of the internet in the late 1990s-early 2000s — there was a huge amount of excitement, a lot of (over)investment, a recession bust and, now, the internet is a viable part of our economy. But that took *years*.

This is a known economic cycle, specifically the **Gartner Hype Cycle** (which has very descriptive names for the stages). Right now, the AI boom is nearing the “Peak of Inflated Expectations.” Soon there will be a bust. Then, AI will slog its way through the “Trough of Disillusionment” and eventually climb up the “Slope of Enlightenment” before it delivers on a promise worth the hype.

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Between here and there, bubbles will burst, real estate will crash, companies will go bankrupt and lives will be damaged. If we don't protect ourselves, Georgia will very likely be stuck with about \$60 billion in unused power infrastructure and a landscape littered with the hollowed-out carcasses of unneeded and obsolete AI data centers.

We will be buried so deep in debt and stranded assets that we will be unable to invest in the subsequent technology innovation economy. We won't be able to climb the “Slope of Enlightenment” and actually grow our economy. We've barely recovered from the mill closures and manufacturing losses of the past 50 years.

Don't take on public debt for privatized profit

We don't even have to rely on historical trends, science is pointing to another overbuild. Recently, [Science for Georgia and Greenlink analytics](#) conducted a study on behalf of Southern Environmental Law Center that found the utility's predicted asset needs have only 0.2% chance of happening. Our independent analysis found the most likely need is approximately half what Georgia Power is asking for.

Eliminating tax breaks and ensuring Big Tech pays the full burden of the speculative buildout is the only responsible path forward to protect Georgians from crippling debt. These are trillion-dollar companies. Let them pay for what they want. Let them carry the risk of the “magnificent future” they are selling us.

The bills in the Georgia General Assembly that would have protected average Georgia residents and small businesses have been killed by Big Tech and Georgia Power. Flush with cash and armed with high-priced lobbyists, these corporations have made it crystal

clear: They want every upside of the tech boom and none of the risk. They want Georgia taxpayers to hold that bag.

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All we are asking is that Georgia residents and Georgia small businesses not be forced to take on public debt for privatized profit. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Being the [No. 1 state to do business](#) does not mean being a doormat. Companies will still come to Georgia because we have a thriving business ecosystem, a world-class university system and amazing people.

This is our competitive advantage — not subsidized boxes filled with computers and no jobs. We are asking the Georgia General Assembly to protect our children and to give them a fighting chance to be a part of the future economy — not a front-row seat to the “wrong side of the tracks” warehouse district.

Amy Sharma, Ph.D., is the executive director of [Science for Georgia](#), a nonprofit organization focused on getting science out of the lab and into service of society. She leads a coalition of data center responders and has co-authored a report, [“Impacts of Projected Data Center Growth and Emerging Uncertainties on Power Demand in the Southeast.”](#)

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