

## New economic vision urgently needed for Georgia

Georgia's prolonged status as most business-friendly state raises troubling questions about trade-offs made to achieve it.

Consider these disturbing indicators of such trade-offs:

- Georgia is one of the nation's worst states in ranking of cancer-causing water pollution and related premature deaths.
- While corporate profits skyrocket, average wages flounder and unionization is impeded by state policy.
- Over 200,000 households are disconnected yearly from Georgia Power service due to high utility costs relative to income.
- Inflation is being caused by corporate price gouging, which accounts for about half of recent consumer price increases according to Forbes.
- Electricity costs for most residential customers increased by 40% while industrial rates rose by less than 10%, meaning residents are unknowingly subsidizing industry.
- Tax credits and other state subsidies boost corporate profits, while local property taxes for many citizens rise faster than their income.

The foolhardy recklessness of Georgia's pro-business fixation is underscored by heated disputes over the Twin Pines mining proposal at Trail Ridge, which directly threatens the world-renowned Okefenokee Swamp. In a written statement, a hundred well-qualified scientists have testified about the unacceptable risks: "Mining close to the swamp has a high likelihood of causing permanent damage" to the Okefenokee.

Engineering solutions to prevent various destructive impacts of the project on the swamp are claimed, but such methods are unproven and prone to unexpected failures. Yet, thanks to Georgia's business-friendly blind-eye, state officials appear ready to put the Okefenokee in needless jeopardy, just to strip-mine titanium, among the most commonly found minerals. The cavalier marginalization of serious hazards to this world-class environmental treasure is tragic testimony to the abject failure of Georgia's outdated economic-development standards.

To prevent irreversible damage to the Okefenokee a new vision for Georgia's economic future is imperative.

As another indication of problems caused by irresponsible favors for Big Business, consider that despite Georgia developing a Climate Pollution Reduction Plan, the state's Public Service Commission is considering approval of Georgia Power's proposal to use still more natural gas to generate electricity. In addition to releasing heat-trapping carbon-dioxide, using natural gas is linked to methane leaks that have far worse over-heating effects than CO<sub>2</sub>, yet these factors remain unevaluated. Although Georgia's draft CPRP just submitted to EPA supports the use of clean energy, it is conspicuously silent about curbing the use of fossil-fuels to generate power – presumably to accommodate the profit-making goals of Georgia Power.

Until Georgia establishes a more equitable and transparent procedure for ensuring accountable economic development decisions, the workforce, citizens, and taxpayers will continue to suffer. The adversities of trade-offs to industry include debilitating public health, unfair burdens on taxpayers to subsidize infrastructure needed by corporate operations, and, above all, declining quality of life caused by poor enforcement of environmental safeguards essential to protecting life-support systems and preventing the catastrophic consequences of climate change.

David Kyler  
Center for a Sustainable Coast  
Saint Simons Island