

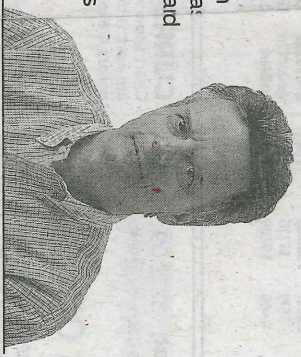
What is Atlanta Forward?

Our region is an important part of a complex world. On these pages, we will bring you a wide array of viewpoints and insights on the issues you've told us are most important to you. We're committed to bringing you smart work by some of the best thinkers in metro Atlanta and beyond. We want to involve you in the conversation, too, so let us know what you think.

Today's moderator: Tom Sabulis

A 20-year veteran of the AJC, Tom Sabulis has covered news, politics and the arts during a career that has taken him to newspapers across the country. Since 2008, he has coordinated many of the newspaper's pro/con debates and first-person guest columns.

» [Join the discussion online today.](#) Share your opinions and ideas at [blogs.ajc.com/atlanta-forward](#).



FRIDAY CONVERSATION: QUALITY OF LIFE

Does government have to play fair? A Georgia environmentalist says it's not a level playing field when it comes to alternative energy getting the kind of government support traditionally offered to the fossil-fuel industry. A conservative writer counters that the mandating of renewable energy will increase our cost of living, even as air quality improves.

GUEST COLUMN

Clean options merit some breaks, too

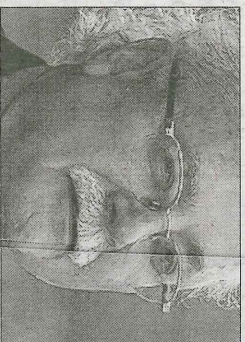
By David Kyler

It is often said that morality cannot be legislated, but that doesn't keep people from trying. Yet the public issues most commonly portrayed in moral dimensions seldom if ever include job creation, technology and the use and protection of natural resources.

Our state and nation would benefit greatly by linking government policies to standards that balance moral goals such as fairness and honesty with other important objectives, including economic opportunity, education, public health and defending civil liberties.

For instance, when energy policy favors conventional sources of power like fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) without comparable support for clean alternatives such as solar and wind power, it fails to meet the moral test of fairness and honesty. Jobs per dollar invested and per unit of energy produced are higher in solar and wind technologies than in traditional power plants.

It is unfair to deprive the public of the benefits of alternative energy and to protect the vested interests of the relatively few who are financially favored by the "fossilized" status quo. Likewise, it is dishonest to deny the threats caused by global climate change and



David Kyler is executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast in Saint Simons.

its combustion-related causes.

The longer status-quo policies prevail, the greater the penalties on future generations, with potentially catastrophic consequences. While social programs are often condemned for longer-term moral implications, political analysis of energy and environmental policies misleadingly marginalizes them. Discounting cumulative damage to water, air and living resources imposes costly burdens on human health and economic prospects.

Even with existing safeguards in place, millions of Americans still suffer the effects of pollution. Asthma, encephalitis and other diseases are agonizing penalties imposed by dirty industries. Yet the cost of these injuries — in employment potential, medical treatment and shortened lifespan — are condoned under current policies and practices.

Defenders of the status quo also attack subsidies for green technologies, asserting that "free markets" should be the determinant of successful innovation. Such assertions also conflict with fundamental moral principles. It is dishonest to portray leading energy technologies as if they were a result of free markets.

Coal, oil and gas have been lavishly subsidized for decades. Dominant energy technologies impose hidden costs not tabulated in their market price. One respected expert estimates that tabulating pollution clean-up, military costs, and other public obligations supporting fossil fuels would add \$12 per gallon at the pump.

Should taxpayers and consumers accommodate the electric power industry, the state's largest water user, by exempting it from the deceptively named Georgia Water Stewardship Act? This injustice is worsened by the multi-billion-dollar reservoir construction program proposed by Georgia officials, to be paid for by residential and commercial water customers rather than the biggest water user.

If we agree that public policies should be guided by moral principles, surely we must adopt judicious and accountable methods for making such determinations.

Atlanta Forward »

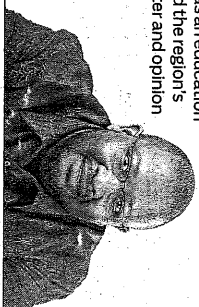
What is Atlanta Forward?

Our region is an important part of a complex world. On these pages, we will bring you a wide array of viewpoints and insights on the issues you've told us are most important to you. We're committed to bringing you smart work by some of the best thinkers in metro Atlanta and beyond. We want to involve you in the conversation, too, so let us know what you think.

Today's moderator: Rick Badie

Rick Badie joined The Atlanta Journal-Constitution as an education reporter in 1997. A South Georgia native, he's covered the region's immigrant communities, was a feature obituary writer and opinion columnist for the AJC's Gwinnett edition.

»Join the discussion online: Share your opinions and ideas at blogs.ajc.com/atlanta-forward.



WEDNESDAY CONVERSATION: REGIONAL ECONOMY

The U.S. House of Representatives cleared an obstacle to deepening the Savannah harbor with passage of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act. It removes a spending cap on the dredging project. Rep. Jack Kingston of Savannah praises the "pro-job, pro-America" legislation. A coastal environmentalist deems it a "major setback." To comment, go to: <http://blogs.ajc.com/atlanta-forward/>

GUEST COLUMN

Project squanders millions

By David Kyler

In the interest of taxpayers and full disclosure, some important considerations need to be brought to light regarding the recent approval of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRDA) by the U.S. House of Representatives.

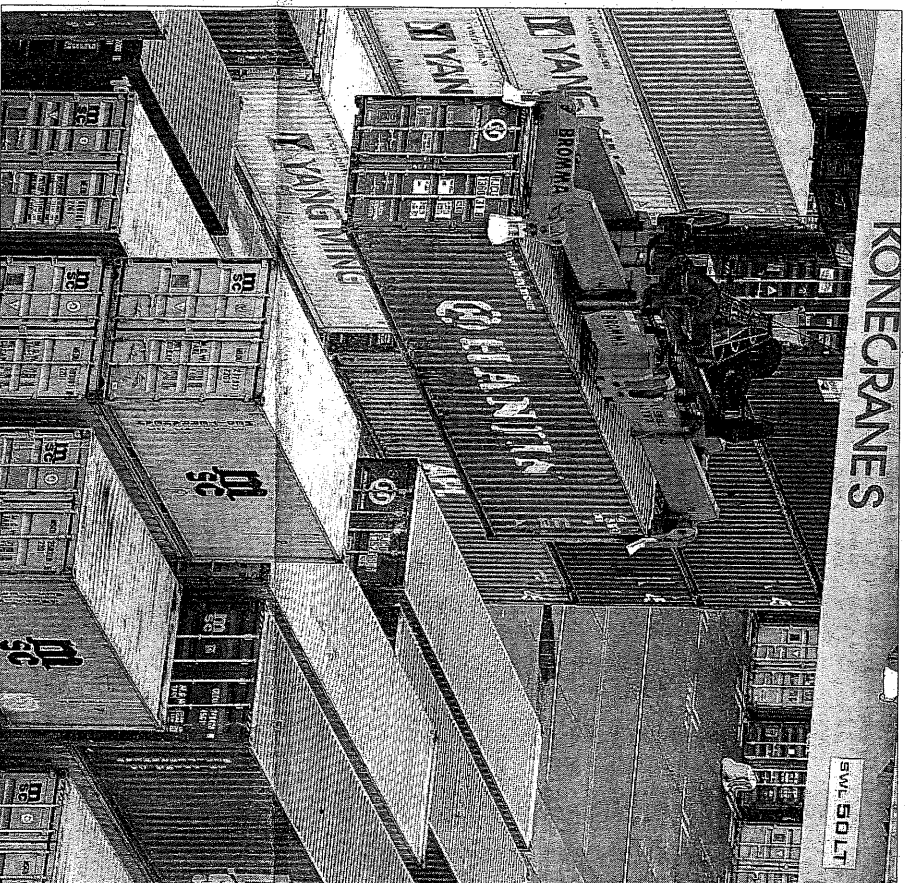
Contrary to Rep. Jack Kingston's praise for cutting "budget-inefficient red tape" and expecting projects, the bill will result in billions in tax dollars squandered on projects of dubious benefit. Moreover, by eliminating important environmental evaluation requirements and spending controls, still more waste at taxpayers' expense will occur.

WRDA is not a "huge win," as Kingston claims, but a fit-into in the fight against pork-barrel spending. This bill is a major setback.

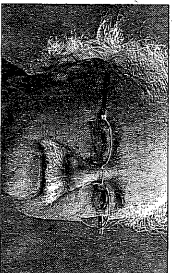
The Savannah harbor deepening project is a prime example of the legislature's failure to honestly support taxpayer interests. Although the project is estimated to cost \$652 million, about half of that is to pay for attempts to limit, or compensate for, harm to water quality, fisheries, wetlands and other resources of great economic value. For this reason alone, it's prudent to doubt the project is well justified.

The history of the Army Corps of Engineers' performance does not bode well for the reliability of such mitigation, its real costs to the public or its proper assessment after implementation. WRDA does nothing to improve these deficiencies.

It doesn't provide the follow-through needed to ensure that when mitigation efforts don't work, project damage will be reliably controlled. Regulatory exemptions created by the act will further weaken controls by eliminating vital review sanctions, causing still more wasted tax dollars, since damage repair after the fact will be expensive, if not impossible. When damage recovery is



The Savannah harbor deepening project has both supporters and detractors. BRANT SANDERLIN / AJC



David Kyler is executive director, Center for a Sustainable Coast.

impossible, economic hardships will be shifted onto tourism, fisheries, coastal communities and property owners, with losses potentially reaching millions of dollars annually. Significantly, despite

lengthy study of the Savannah project, there has never been any evaluation of the actual need for deep-water ports in the Southeast. Based on careful observation of existing ports in the rest of the world, including the U.S. West Coast, only a few deep ports will even be required.

As a candidate for deepening Savannah's port, being 38 miles upriver, does not compare well with other ports in the Southeast, including some that are already deeper than Savannah's will be after spending at least \$652 million. It is notable these other ports are also much more accessible to ocean shipping channels, without risky navigational problems. Many experts agree that U.S. competitiveness in a global market does not depend on deepening every port along the East Coast. For both U.S. competitive interests as well as taxpayer safeguards, it is best to deepen only a few ports strategically located and naturally well-situated. Savannah's port is not one of them. Whether federal funds or state money is used for this project, taxpayers are the unwitting dupes paying the check. The House version of WRDA is the brazen accomplice.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

myajc.com | ajc.com \$1

Credible. Compelling. Complete.

Atlanta Forward »

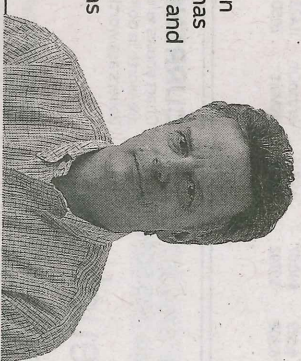
What is Atlanta Forward?

Our region is an important part of a complex world. On these pages, we will bring you a wide array of viewpoints and insights on the issues you've told us are most important to you. We're committed to bringing you smart work by some of the best thinkers in metro Atlanta and beyond. We want to involve you in the conversation, too, so let us know what you think.

Today's moderator: Tom Sabulis

A 20-year veteran of the AJC, Tom Sabulis has covered news, politics and the arts during a career that has taken him to newspapers across the country. Since 2008, he has coordinated many of the newspaper's pro/con debates and first-person guest columns.

» [Join the discussion online today:](#) Share your opinions and ideas at blogs.ajc.com/atlanta-forward.



FRIDAY CONVERSATION: QUALITY OF LIFE

Jekyll Island is a favorite getaway for Atlantans – and home to a dispute over development on the state-owned barrier island. Today, a coastal environmentalist criticizes approval of a 200-room hotel whose height, he says, will harm Jekyll's natural beauty. A spokesman for the governing Jekyll Island Authority declined an invitation to write an op-ed in response, but said the project adheres to building guidelines approved long ago.

GUEST COLUMN

Development speeds Jekyll's urbanization

By David Kyler

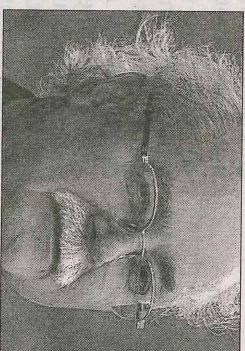
Among continuing disputes over the "revitalization" of Jekyll Island State Park is a mega-hotel that will degrade the island's treasured ambience and likely encourage further urban development.

Reaching some 67 feet in height, Jekyll's beachfront Westin hotel will be the tallest structure on Georgia's barrier islands, nearly double the height of anything allowed on Tybee Island and 50 percent taller than any beachfront building allowed on St. Simons and Sea Islands.

A 45-foot height limit was adopted by Glynn County to ensure no structures defile the tree tops of the renowned Golden Isles live oaks. However, the county has no authority over state-owned Jekyll Island.

In 2008, the Jekyll Island Authority (JIA) adopted design guidelines that included a building height limit of up to 72 feet. It was rationalized on the basis of an isolated portion of the island's highest structure – a tower atop the presidential suite at the historic Jekyll Club Hotel.

There are at least two reasons why JIA's reasoning is flawed. First, a tower imposes a far less intrusive, monolithic effect than a warehouse-width building erected to the same



David Kyler is executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast in St. Simons Island.

elevation. Second, the historic hotel is on the back side of the island, nestled among mature trees that soften the visual effect of its scale.

In stark contrast, the Westin will stand on an oceanfront site having no large trees nearby, close to remnant dunes and active sea-turtle nests. Due to the Westin's sheer size as well as its site, the hotel will impair the scenic quality of both the island's entryway and the beach. Late in the day, the structure will cast a massive shadow over the beachfront, making the view look more like Miami Beach than the Golden Isles – damaging the island's most valued asset: its natural, tranquil setting.

JIA has three more hotels waiting for redevelopment. If these are built to the limits of JIA's permissive guidelines, Jekyll's image will rapidly mutate from natural to urban.

Besides profoundly degrading the experience of Jekyll's beach-going tourists, the Westin will pose a significant threat to sea-turtle nesting habitat. Lighting from beachfront structures is the single greatest threat to sea-turtle hatching survival caused by shorefront development. And, according to biologists, artificial lighting problems grow exponentially with the height of shorefront buildings.

Past efforts to implement Jekyll lighting controls have not always been successful. Moreover, the Westin's size and location will make enforcement of lighting ordinances extremely difficult.

The \$200 average room rate predicted for the Westin also seems questionable in view of the affordability required in the founding legislation for the park. Cautivating an exclusive clientele is at odds with that mandate. If hotels now being planned follow this example, a trend toward less affordability will result, clashing with the public purpose of Jekyll Island State Park.

Decisions promoting such mammoth beachfront projects further conflict with the unique tranquility of the Jekyll experience. Concerned Georgians should urge JIA to reduce its building-height limitations.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Credible. Compelling. Complete.

ajc.com | ajc.com

FRIDAY, SEPT. 20, 2013