

OPINION

We must honor our obligation to serve democracy & the common good

It has been said that human life is propelled by a series of decisions, personal and otherwise. That proposition has special significance in a democracy, where we have the opportunity to use our moral authority as citizens to make political choices that can have profound consequences for our collective future. In light of this valuable political opportunity, it should be acknowledged that over the past century, the rapid proliferation of commercialism has come to dominate the choices presented to Americans.

Accordingly, our decision-making role has increasingly shifted to becoming consumers, with a proportional decline in well-informed political engagement. Whether that trend has been orchestrated or is simply a result of gradual adaptation to economic circumstances, the implications should be taken seriously – not only by expressing our views in the voting booth, but also by voicing them in many state and local decisions providing procedures for making public comment through agency review processes, as well as in the media.

There can be little doubt that if our era is objectively chronicled, it will be marred by escalating, corrupt opportunism – exploitative practices being rewarded rather than punished. When the growing injustices of abusing the common good repeatedly go uncorrected, victims become cynically disengaged while grifters are emboldened and empowered.

Consider two prominent examples related to Georgia's Public Service Commission, the agency supposedly responsible for representing the public interest in issues related to the price of electricity, as well as how it's generated and distributed. Contrary to their legal obligation, PSC members have shifted billions-of-dollars in Plant Vogtle expansion cost-overruns from Georgia Power executives and Southern Company stockholders onto residential energy consumers. Southern Company stock-returns and executive salaries soared during the 15-year project, while its subsidiary, Georgia Power, caused massive cost burdens that the PSC converted to a 40% increase in residential utility rates to compensate for corporate blunders. Apparently, the PSC would rather sustain the ample incomes of company executives and stockholders than protect household energy-users and the common good.

Similarly, after a federal court determined that the method for electing PSC members violated the Voting Rights Act, instead of immediately correcting the problem, Georgia courts delayed the next election, extending the terms-of-office for two members by two years. Moreover, while enjoying their unfairly prolonged PSC authority, these members helped worsen Georgia's pollution of air and climate for many years ahead by irresponsibly approving expanded fossil-fuel-burning power-generation instead of converting to clean energy. That decision fundamentally contradicted well-informed public hearing testimony as well as national climate-policy objectives.

Oppression undermines democracy, environmental justice, and the common good when flagrant exploitation by special interests is politically sanctioned instead of being prohibited. As citizens and voters, we must vigilantly strive to fulfill our obligations and use our moral authority to reform political institutions so that they consistently serve urgent priorities essential to safeguarding the future.

Our active engagement in these critical decisions as citizens and voters is imperative.

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