

Bryan County News

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Letter to the editor: Why Georgia needs policy reforms to help curb the climate crisis

Editor's Note: This letter is a rebuttal to Mr. Tim Lowe's Letter to the Editor, published in the Mar. 14 print edition. No further rebuttals will be entertained on the same subject matter.

Dear Editor:

- U.S. performance on reducing climate emissions isn't great, but it is better than Georgia's, so it is disingenuous to cite national emission decline while Georgia's emissions have actually recently worsened.
- To compare U.S. climate emissions with those of China without recognizing the U.S. role as major importer of Chinese-made products is equally misleading. In the past 12 years, America's already huge import of these products grew by 26% to well over a half-trillion dollars annually. It doesn't take an energy expert to understand that by outsourcing our manufacturing to China, U.S. trade policies directly contribute to an enormous portion of China's emissions that are generated by their manufacture of goods bought by Americans.
- Likewise, for countries like the U.S. to reduce emissions from an already high level is more readily accomplished than by those nations still struggling to improve economic conditions. Per capita, China and India, scorned by Mr. Lowe for increasing emissions, have a fraction of the wealth of Americans. Moreover, U.S. emissions per capita – highest in the world – are nearly double those of China and India
- If Georgia is a “beacon” on this issue, it is one that attracts opportunistic manufacturers who get tax breaks, cheap land, and low-cost labor to boost their bottom line, further concentrating wealth among well-heeled stockholders. To describe Georgia as having balanced sustainable development is absurd, as revealed by many harsh facts, including the poor rating given to the state's employment by Oxfam America, which ranks the state third from the bottom. Similarly, a December 2023 survey of workers put Georgia in dead-last place nationally, due to low pay, commute times, and deficient working conditions.
- Yes, Georgia's economy benefits from natural resources, but with alarming, destructive impacts that are clearly not sustainable. Global Forest Watch reports that in just one year [2022], Georgia lost over 3.5 million hectares of forest, and since 2000 suffered a whopping 36% decrease in forestland, causing a reduction of 1.5 gigatons in carbon-storage capacity. Furthermore, Georgia is poorly ranked in terms of health hazards caused by toxic pollution due to decades of lax environmental protection and reckless development policies.
- Another compelling indication of Georgia's negligent, profit-boosting policy is the testimony given last year of John McNutt, an attorney for the U.S. Department of Defense who accused Georgia Power executives of ignoring opportunities to develop clean power for existing customers – instead, seeking new business by burning more planet-heating fossil fuels. The Sierra Club gave Georgia a grade ‘F’ on the state's energy policy for similar reasons.

It is irrefutable that Georgia does not have the glowing record of balanced economic-development performance that Mr. Lowe claims. To the contrary, as I have said repeatedly, Georgia urgently needs a new, responsible vision to ensure that development serves the interests of workers, taxpayers, and – above all – our environment and quality of life.

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