

Hit the brakes on data centers

With our governor heading the charge, Texas plans to lead the nation in building data centers and the heavily polluting gas turbine power plants they require, according to a recent study by the Environmental Integrity Project.

The study states that these plants "plan to emit tons of greenhouse gases and air pollution." The Texas Public Utilities Commission recently requested information from data center companies on how much water and energy they plan to use. But "at a legislative hearing in late June, legislators were told less than a third of the companies surveyed responded, according to the Texas Tribune.

Data centers are taking advantage of Texas' weak regulatory structure to vastly expand their plans.

OpenAI's Stargate is building a massive data center near Abilene. According to a story by Floodlight/Texas Tribune, "On paper, Stargate's Abilene campus started out small, but through a permitting loophole identified by Floodlight, it was able to quietly construct massive power sources with little-to-no public notice.

"Dozens of Texas data centers have obtained these minor air permits — which avoid public scrutiny and extensive environmental. In several cases, data centers secured these permits before seeking massive expansions later on, deploying a 'small first, big later' strategy that watchdogs say limits public input and creates unstoppable momentum for their projects," Floodlight wrote.

In a recent poll conducted by the University of Texas/Texas Politics Project, "a majority of

PROGRESSIVE VIEWS

**LAURA
BRAY**

KENDALL COUNTY
DEMOCRAT



Texans oppose the construction of data centers in their community, including nearly two-thirds of Texans living in rural areas. Texas is poised to be the No. 1 market for data centers in the U.S., with the most planned projects of any state."

These ever-more-frequent stories make me wonder if anyone at the state leadership level is looking at impacts to our wobbly power grid and already-scarce water supplies, leaving "communities competing for basic resources," said State Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer (D-San Antonio).

Residents are beginning to fight back against this headlong rush. Particularly in unincorporated areas with little to no zoning power, like rural Caldwell County, "many projects are already moving forward, leaving residents worried that any guardrails put in place may come too late."

Other rural counties such as Angelina (Lufkin) and Hood (Granbury) are also resisting the push.

Even transitional counties such as Hays (San Marcos) are beginning to resist.

In late June, Hays County "suspended approvals for data centers and other large, water-intensive developments through the end of the year and joined the growing number of counties across the state asking lawmakers to give them more regulatory authority."

State Republicans seem to be hearing the message from their core rural voters. In late June, the

governor called for a ban on data centers in rural Texas neighborhoods.

But what does that mean, exactly, "rural Texas neighborhoods"? According to Politico, "Abbott received at least \$1.6 million in campaign funds from tech executives" in 2025. More than a decade ago, the Texas Legislature approved huge tax breaks for data centers. Watch what our state leadership does — and who donates to their campaigns — not what they say.

"Data centers are here, and the issues they bring are a challenge we must meet, but it cannot come at Texans' expense," Martinez Fischer said. Enacting responsible oversight must be a priority when the next session of the Texas Legislature convenes in January.

It's time to call your representatives — Rep. Ellen Troxclair, 512-463-0490; Sen. Donna Campbell, 512-463-0125 — and demand that they "hit the brakes" on this reckless development until more guidelines are in place.

In our next column, we begin our series to familiarize you with the seven statewide offices on the November ballot. These columns will assist you in making an informed choice when you vote.

First up is railroad commissioner, and we'll close, right before the election, with governor.

Visit our website at www.kcdems.us to learn how you can get involved in driving change.

Call our office at 830-331-1243 or stop by at 216 E. Blanco, Suite 201 to say hello and learn more about our activities and activism.

Laura Bray is the former Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party

