

# The PSC Pulse

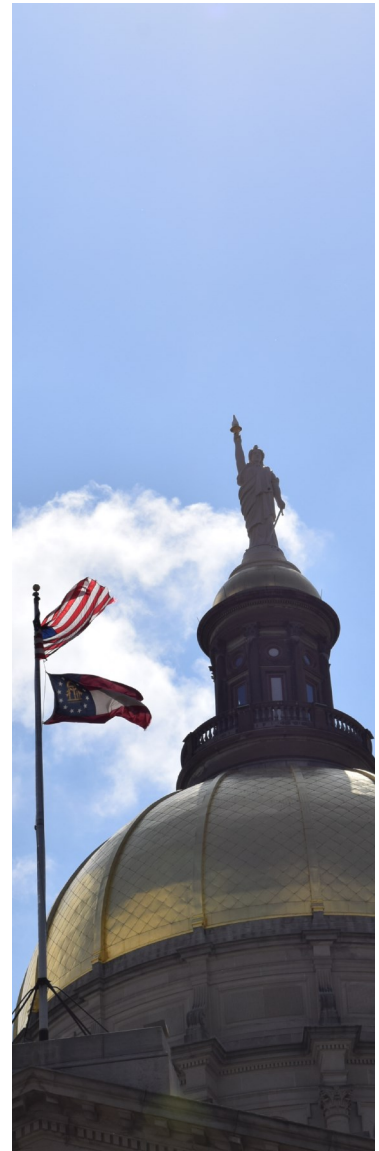
## *AFTER VOLATILE ELECTION YEAR, PSC REMAINS THE SAME*



The election year went into overtime, with long-time Commissioner **Lauren “Bubba” McDonald** in a runoff to retain his seat. Still, the two Georgia Public Service Commissioners who were up for re-election retained their seats after the final votes were tallied.

Commissioner **Jason Shaw**, who was appointed to the PSC in 2019, garnered 50.11-percent of the vote on Nov. 3. Commissioner McDonald remained just under the mandated majority win with 49.91 percent.

In the Jan. 5 runoff — where two U.S. Senate seats received nationwide attention — McDonald held off his challenger while the other two incumbents on the ballot fell short. McDonald received nearly 20,000 more votes than Sen. David Perdue and nearly 39,000 more votes than Sen. Kelly Loeffler, securing his role as PSC Commissioner for another six-year term. After all ballots were counted, nearly 4.5 million Georgians voted.



**COMMUNITY  
FOCUS WITH COM-  
MISSIONER TIM  
ECHOLS  
THURSDAYS**

Community Focus, hosted by Commissioner **Tim Echols** and co-hosted by **Faith Henning**, will highlight a different Georgia Community each week. Echols says he believes a lot of good things are happening in Georgia, and he wants to make sure people know about them.

Each show will feature four segments:

- Clean Energy Done Right
- Human Trafficking Spotlight
- Good Citizen Showcase
- Community Headlines

Click [here](#) to select dates and to RSVP.

**ENERGY  
MATTERS**

A RADIO SHOW

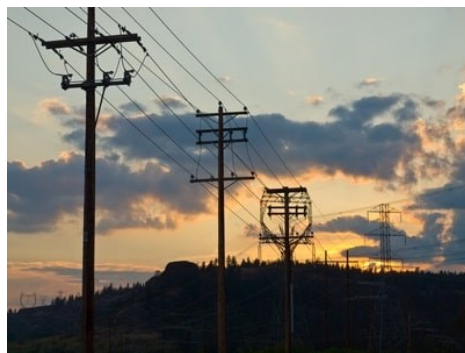
*"Helping you save money,  
use technology  
and be more sustainable."*

Search and subscribe to **Energy Matters with Commissioner Echols** on Apple, Spotify, Sound Cloud, Google, Stitcher, Tune In or wherever you get your podcast. New episodes every Tuesday and Thursday.

**PSC MAKES HISTORIC DECISION ON  
POLE ATTACHMENT FEES**

The Georgia Public Service Commission approved a policy for broadband expansion pursuant to House Bill 244 that requires Electric Membership Cooperatives to charge a simple \$1-per-year fee for entities to attach utility service to poles in areas "unserved" by broadband. The \$1 per year fee will be set for six years.

Commissioner **Tricia Pridemore** added a successful motion to set pole rates in areas currently served by broadband to \$27.71 per pole per year. This is an "at cost" fee to cover upkeep of the poles.



"Served" and "unserved" areas are determined by the Georgia Broadband Initiative map published by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Commission Chairman **Chuck Eaton** also made a successful motion that requires EMCs to report to the PSC every two years with total revenue made from pole attachments and the total number of attachments to their poles. It also requires telecom companies to report their total investment in Georgia's broadband expansion and their total number of broadband customers.

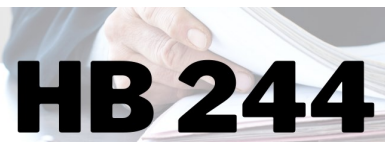
Commissioner **Lauren "Bubba" McDonald** was supported by all of his colleagues in a motion to ensure speedy repairs and added safety to poles damaged in storms or otherwise.

For Commissioner **Jason Shaw**, this is a personal issue as he lives in a rural community in South Georgia.

"I see, first hand, children who must travel long distances to find sufficient wifi just to finish their homework. PSC staff worked very hard on this difficult issue. I hope providers will take advantage of this \$1 deal to push broadband into rural areas."

Fee rates have been a point of contention between telecom companies and EMCs for many years. As the vital need for broadband service in rural areas has begun to grow, the issue of pole attachment fees has become a major issue in Georgia.

To resolve the dispute, the General Assembly passed HB 244 – also called "the Georgia Broadband Opportunity Act" – in the 2020 session. HB 244 charged the Commission with determining the rates, fees, terms, conditions and specifications in any pole attachment agreement by a communications service provider and an EMC on and after July 1, 2021.



## GEORGIA POWER DEFAULT RATES CHANGE FOR NEWLY CONSTRUCTED HOMES

A Georgia Power rate plan that caters to energy customers who monitor their usage became the default rate for newly-constructed homes on January 1. This is the first time new sign-ups for Georgia Power will default to any rate other than the standard residential rate.

Now, all newly-built Georgia homes default to the “Smart Usage” plan when residents activate accounts with Georgia Power. New-home customers can opt out of the Smart Usage plan and choose any other eligible plan when they sign up for power. At the request of the Georgia Public Service Commission, Georgia Power will discuss the new-construction default with the state’s home building industry.



Any customers who start Smart Usage will be locked in for one year before they can change plans.



Georgia  
Power

Under Smart Usage, customers who spend a little extra time figuring out how and when they use the most electricity can save money on their bills. The plan charges less per kilowatt hour for power used at off-peak times and charges a lower fee for customers who manage how much electricity they use at any one time.

Peak times for electricity are 2 - 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, June through September, with the exception of holidays. Customers with Smart Usage pay more per kilowatt hour for electricity used in this time period. They pay less for energy used at other times.

Likewise, customers on this plan can save money by managing their demand level. This relates to how much energy is being used at the highest point of their consumption in any given month. Under Smart Usage, customers would pay more on their bills if they dry clothes, run the dish washer and bake cookies in the oven at the same time.

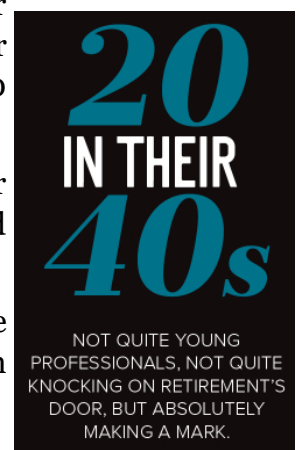
"Smart customers need to make sure they are on the rate plan that will save them the most money and energy," said PSC Vice Chairman **Tim Echols**. "That means calling Georgia Power or consulting with an energy professional to evaluate the best plan available."

## COMMISSIONER PRIDEMORE HONORED BY COBB LIFE MAGAZINE AS ONE OF “20 In Their 40s.”

Cobb Life Magazine, published by the Marietta Daily Journal, put together a list of the county’s top leaders who happen to be in their 40s. PSC Commissioner **Tricia Pridemore**, through her hard work and dedication to public service, was one of 20 Cobb County residents honored.

Check out the January 2021 issue where Commissioner Pridemore mentions her role at the PSC, her hobbies and her reliance on prayer and coffee.

Said Pridemore in the issue: “Georgia is a wonderful place to raise a family, start a business and enjoy nature. In 2021, let’s hold onto the values that make us special.”





## COMMISSION HIRES NEW ACCOUNTANT, NEW ATTORNEY



**Jane Stroeva** started in the fiscal division in November. She received her Masters of Professional Accountancy and Accounting degrees from Georgia State University and is CPA licensed in the State of Georgia.

Jane's previous work experiences, education and CPA make her a strong asset to the Commission.



The PSC Legal Division is happy to announce the hiring of **Alex Davis** as its most recent member.

Alex comes to the Commission after his recent graduation from Emory Law School. He passed the Georgia Bar Exam in December.

## COMMISSIONER ECHOLS ORGANIZES EMC KART RACE FOR FUN AND CHARITY

A few months ago, after a tour of the Amicalola EMC territory in North Georgia, the president and CEO of the EMC, Todd Payne, took Georgia Public Service Commission Vice Chairman **Tim Echols** to Atlanta Motorsports Park in Dawsonville for a karting race. Hitting speeds close to 60 m.p.h. – and losing badly – gave Commissioner Echols an idea.

What if officials with each of Georgia's EMCs got into a kart and held a race? The winner would get bragging rights. The losers would all have to ask their boards for funding in the 2021 budget to purchase an electric vehicle (EV) for the EMC's fleet. The EMCs got together and added a second incentive for partici-



*The race begins*



*Dennis Chastain and Commissioner **Tim Echols***

pation – \$10,000 for the H.E.A.T. Georgia program donated by Georgia EMC, the cooperatives' statewide trade group. H.E.A.T. Georgia, or the Heating Energy Assistance Team, helps senior citizens, the medically fragile and people with low incomes to pay their heating bills through the colder months.

On October 9, at Atlanta Motorsports Park, 18 representatives from 16 EMCs jumped into race karts and hit the gas pedal.

"It's all in good fun," Commissioner Echols said. "But at the same time, I hope this brings awareness to alternative fuel vehicles. Those of us in the business of ensuring Georgians are provided with safe, efficient, and stable electricity should be at the forefront of the electric car movement."

After a qualifying round, Cobb EMC President Peter Heintzelman posted the fastest time but volunteered for the last pole position – given his history with kart racing and his past experience racing real cars.

Just one lap into the race, Heintzelman had passed 15 of the 18 karts to take third place. By the sixth lap, he was in second. Regardless, it was Chris Stephens of Coweta-Fayette EMC who came in first, Heintzelman came in second and Steve Chalker of Jefferson Energy held third place. All participants except Stephens will have to ask their boards of directors for money to purchase an electric vehicle for their EMC's fleet.



*Cobb EMC President Peter Heintzelman gives the thumbs up as he's about to head to the starting point*

## ROB AND JAMIE NEW ROLES

When **Sheree Kernizan** left the Public Service Commission to enjoy her retirement, utilities analyst **Rob Trokey** was promoted into her position. At nearly the same time, the Commission voted to create a new department, the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Unit. They put EERE manager and all-around renewable guru **Jamie Barber** into the director position.

Jamie started with the Commission in 1993 in the Fiscal Office. Since then, she has worked in the Electric Unit and the Natural Gas Unit. In 2010, she became manager of the ARRA/EERE Group. She has an MBA from University of West Georgia.

Rob, now the Director of the Electric Unit, came to the Commission after working in the private sector, as well as the Colorado Office of Consumer Counsel, doing economic, accounting, and compliance work. He joined the Commission in 2007, working in the Electric Unit and holds a Master's in Economics.



## THE CHAIRMAN AND THE GOVERNOR



Public Service Commission Chairman **Chuck Eaton**, and department heads from across the state government, met with Gov. Brian Kemp and his staff in Early January.

The budget, Gov. Kemp said, is in good shape for the upcoming year with little expectation for cuts.

Likewise, Kemp and his staff discussed the COVID-19 virus and vaccination plans. By Early January, 247,000 Georgians had already been vaccinated. These include frontline workers and the elderly.

Problems with vaccinations mostly centered on the ability to get vaccine supplies from the federal government. But, as the FDA approves more vaccines and distribution methods improve, the Governor's Office hopes to start immunizing educators and, soon, the public at large.



## COMMISSIONER PRIDEMORE: BUSY AS ALWAYS

Commissioner **Tricia Pridemore** has co-written a paper for the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners that seeks to improve awareness of artificial intelligence tools and practices among public utility commissions.

She was also appointed by NARUC to the Natural Gas Partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy, which facilitates the exchange of information on emerging regulatory and technological solutions to advance the safety, reliability, resilience, affordability and environmental performance of the nation's natural gas infrastructure.

The paper and the appointment are somewhat related. The NARUC paper cites three challenges common to natural gas distribution utilities: aging infrastructure replacement, excavator damage to underground infrastructure, and customer participation in energy efficiency programs. The Natural Gas Partnership helps to facilitate the exchange of information on emerging regulatory and technological solutions to advance the performance of the nation's natural gas infrastructure.



# IN MEMORIAM

## CHERYL VINSON DUMAS

Dec. 26, 1956—Dec. 28, 2020

Reading the messages left on the funeral home website, several sentiments about **Cheryl Vinson Dumas** were repeated often by co-workers, friends and family: kindness, wisdom, faith, laughter.

“Cheryl always had a smile on her face, no matter the situation,” one read.

“She was a beautiful light that shines so bright!,” read another. “Her love and compassion for everyone will truly be missed!!”

“She was loving and kind to all.”

“Cheryl gave great hugs.”

Cheryl, the Public Service Commission Human Resources Director, passed away December 28.

Cheryl came to Atlanta from Akron, Ohio, where she obtained her degree from the University of Akron.

She served her church, she was forever loyal to her friends and family, and she performed her job admirably and always with grace.

Her life was filled with joy including the romance of her marriage to Alexander Dumas; the fun of appearing in a Consumer Cellular TV ad; a once-in-a-lifetime-trip to travel to Africa including a visit to see the pyramids; and even getting to carry the Olympic torch for a short distance in 1996.

She was a remarkable person who certainly made her mark on the PSC and all of its employees.



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## EARNEST WHATLEY

Jan. 24, 1966 — Jan. 21, 2021

On Capitol Hill **Earnest Whatley** was known affectionately by many as the “Gentle Giant.” His awesome height was second only to his generous, fun-loving spirit which made him a friend to all. He was almost never without a smile.

Earnest began his career with the Commission on July 1, 1994 working with the Executive Secretary and Records departments and progressed on to Business Analyst in the Internal Consultants unit where he managed consultant contracts and budgets well in excess of millions of dollars with the utmost integrity. He also served as the Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Homeland Security Coordinator for the Commission. That position holds significant importance since the PSC regulates the state’s energy.



His family at the Public Service Commission was large, but that was nothing new to Earnest. He was born in Atlanta one of 11 children. When he passed away, he left behind the love of his life, Carloyn Render, as well as his mother, brothers and sisters, a granddaughter, nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts and more friends than can be listed.

In more than 26 years of service to the State of Georgia, Earnest displayed a commitment to the Commission’s mission to exercise its authority and influence ensuring consumers receive safe, reliable and reasonably priced telecommunications, electric and natural gas services.

Earnest will be missed dearly.

**HAPPY  
ANNIVERSARY!**



**15 YEARS**

**Lisa Jensen**



**25 YEARS**

**Dona Cucich**



**ON TO RETIREMENT**



**33 YEARS**

In 1987, **Dennis Sewell** began his career at the Commission with Rates & Tariffs Engineering, which eventually became the Telecommunications Section. On a parallel track, Dennis began military service which spanned over 30 years of reserve and active duty with the United States Army. He began his service as an enlisted soldier and retired in 2010 as a commissioned full Colonel. He was deployed three times. In his final assignment Dennis was responsible for the backbone fiber optics

and satellite communications for the U.S. lead Forces in Afghanistan.

Dennis' accomplishments for the citizens of Georgia, include several special projects, Integrated Resource Plans, rates cases and a developed expertise in nuclear issues. He represented the Commission on the Nuclear Waste Strategy Coalition, the Critical Consumers Issues Forum, and was the leader of the Commissioner Advisory Staff for Vogtle Units 3 & 4 Construction Monitoring.

**Lynn Buffington** spent 27 years working for Atlanta Gas Light before even coming to the Public Service Commission in 2000. As a pipeline safety inspector, he was always willing to go the extra mile to help small operators with compliance issues.

Friends, colleagues and operators knew that Lynn was knowledgeable about his work and they could trust what he said. He was always willing to head out to a site or incident and was the PSC's only inspector who inspected every jurisdictional operator in Georgia.

In short, Lynn knew what he was doing and people respected him for it – although maybe his aversion for computers left him frustrated from time to time.

In retirement, he plans to continue hiking, visiting family and playing with his Blue Heeler dogs.



**20 YEARS**



**19 YEARS**

**Angela Hwang** started her work at the Public Service Commission fiscal office in 2001.

A trained CPA, Angela was known for her efficiency, always ensuring the financial business of the Commission was in order.

She retired in August 2020 and will be missed.

## COMMISSION CALENDAR

### February 2021

Committee Meetings—2/11  
Administrative Session—2/16  
Committee Meetings— 2/25

### March 2021

Administrative Session—3/2  
Committee Meetings—3/11  
Administrative Session—3/16

### April 2021

Committee Meetings—4/1  
State Holiday—4/3  
Administrative Session—4/6  
Committee Meetings—4/15  
Administrative Session—4/20  
Committee Meetings—4/29

## UPCOMING HOLIDAYS



**Friday, April 3**



**Monday, May 31**



**To Be Observed  
Monday, July 5**

### Georgia Public Service Commission

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### COMMISSIONERS

**Chuck Eaton, Chairman  
Tim G. Echols, Vice Chair  
Lauren “Bubba” McDonald  
Tricia Pridemore  
Jason Shaw**

The Public Information Office publishes The PSC Pulse for the Georgia Public Service Commission. Information for The PSC Pulse should be sent to the attention of **Tom Krause, Public Information Officer** or **Lynn Page, Newsletter Editor**.

**Executive Director: Deborah Flannagan  
Executive Secretary: Reece McAlister**