

EDITORIALS & OPINION

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GUEST COLUMNIST ■ TIM ECHOLS

Atlanta realizing deferred maintenance leads to increased costs & reliability failures

Atlanta City Hall leaders were recently chastised by a citizen speaking at a public forum for investing in what she called “vanity” projects instead of water and sewer upgrades. She got a loud “Amen.” As a state energy regulator who has focused on infrastructure for the future, I have received an earful as well. Here is why it matters to make utility investments.



Echols

First, it is a simple truth that deferred maintenance leads to increased costs and reliability failures. It goes without saying that no one wants to pay more on their bills for things they don't see or understand — until there is a crisis like Atlanta recently experienced. And while approving rate increases for things like smarter systems, more transmission, and clean energy gets me cards and letters from complaining ratepayers, it pales in comparison to the alternative. States like California and Texas have experienced rolling blackouts with public officials begging people on social media not to do laundry, run their AC, or charge their electric car. And as much as I hate to raise rates for anything, keeping Georgia's grid with high reserve margins and reliability is paramount to me. Mechanical things break, and they must be replaced with smarter components as we go.

Second, while everyone likes the idea of clean energy, Georgia is “reliability” centric. One of the reasons so many manufacturers, data centers and businesses are coming to Georgia is we have the power and gas they need. I recently had a call from the Teachers Retirement System of California quizzing me about our future as they were investing their retirement funds in Southern Company stock. Ironic, right? But the truth be told, your Public Service Commission, elected by all Georgia voters, is very tuned

into what matters to the average Georgian. Economic opportunity, lower rates and, most importantly, a grid and gas system you can count on every day. There are those who come before our Commission that would put the Southern Company into junk-bond status, if they could. They advocate that we follow Germany and California's lead and build a grid on intermittent resources and go to war against natural gas yet become indignant when we make infrastructure upgrades to protect reliability.

Finally, the 1991 Integrated Resource Planning Act (IRP) created by the Georgia General Assembly, authored by then-Representative Boyd Pettit, has served us well. We have a similar planning system for gas supply and infrastructure that gets updated every three years by your Georgia Public Service Commission. On the electricity side, the IRP factors in load, needed generation, energy efficiency opportunities, transmission, and a whole lot more. We update the plan religiously every three years and then approve the upgrades, maintenance, compliance and later in the year, approve the rates to complete the approved projects. Big cities would do well to manage their water and sewer upgrades in a similar systematic fashion.

Everyone likes to talk about shiny objects, the latest gizmos, and popular programs, but not at the expense of critical infrastructure that impacts the daily lives of citizens. My job and that of my colleagues is to make sure this power grid and gas pipeline system function at a high-level — decades into the future. By God's grace and some good planning, we'll keep doing that.

Tim Echols is vice-chair of the Georgia Public Service Commission.

LOCAL COLUMNIST ■ DICK YARBROUGH

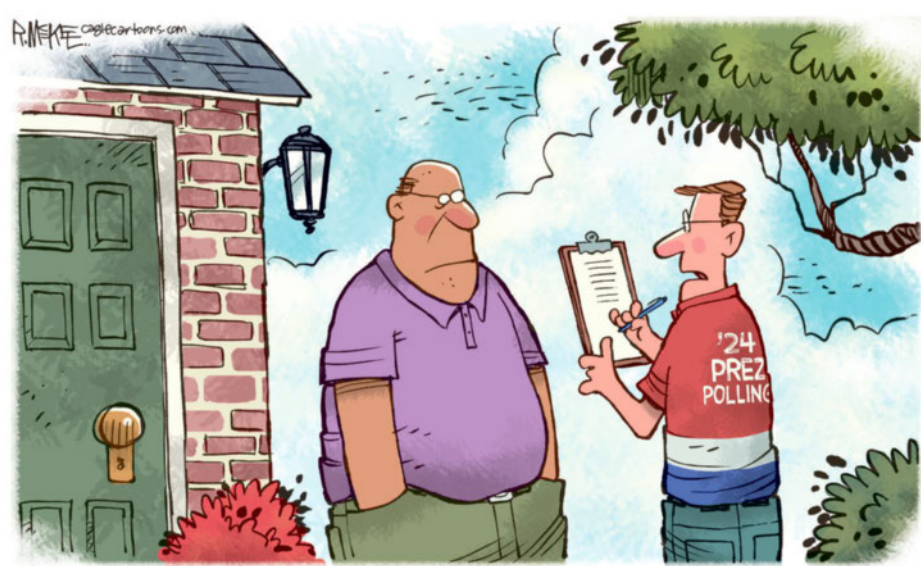


Yarbrough

Columnist Dick Yarbrough will be out this week, but is expected back next week. He's on vacation in Montana or Canada (he gets those two places confused).

You can reach Dick Yarbrough at dick@dickyarbrough.com or at P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139

THE DRAWING BOARD



"BUT, IF SOMEONE DID PUT A GUN TO YOUR HEAD, WHO WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?"

AROUND TOWN

DEBATE PARTIES IN COBB; NATHAN WADE'S JUDGMENT

For the first time this election season, President **Joe Biden** and former President **Donald Trump** will be sharing a debate stage. But in order to prevent outbursts that defined the debates of the 2020 election, Thursday's event comes with a special set of rules.

Hosted at CNN's studios in Atlanta, moderators **Jake Tapper** and **Dana Bash** will be responsible for cutting off candidates' mics as soon as their speaking time is up. There will be no props or notes allowed on stage, and no live audience to cheer or boo.

"I think that's pretty ridiculous," Cobb GOP Chair **Salleigh Grubbs** told *Around Town*. "I think it's unnecessary. You're having a presidential debate, and you're gonna be cutting off the mics? I mean, what happened to free speech in this country?"

Cobb Democrats Chair **Essence Johnson** disagreed.

"I think having that control over (Trump) and the ability for the American voters to actually hear what the two candidates are saying, I think that gives him the inability to just take over and try to control something," Johnson said. "It's almost like 'The Apprentice,' 'You're fired.'"

Johnson added that it was unfortunate the debate has been reduced to just the candidates and the moderators, taking away citizens' chances to directly question candidates.

"... Donald Trump has basically robbed (people of) the ability to ask a question and be present at these historic events," she said.

While Johnson said she anticipates "the convicted felon" will shout out of turn, Grubbs noted that though the American people may want more robust debates, she expects both candidates to control themselves.

"They agreed to the rules. And the rules are the rules. But I just don't think that's what the American people want. The American people want **Lincoln-Douglas**-style debates. And how fair is CNN going to be?" Grubbs said.

Speaking of Trump's conviction, Grubbs' hopes the former president hammers the "prosecutorial overreach" she believes led to him being found guilty on 34 felony counts last month.

"If they can come after him, they can come after any one of us. I think it's completely a politically motivated persecution and prosecution," Grubbs said.

Johnson expects the candidates will touch on issues like unemployment, foreign policy, transportation and natural resources. Her hope is people of color are not left out of the conversation.

"Diversity, and ensuring people of color are addressed," Johnson said. "With that, I think about generational wealth ... the fiduciary impacts of families, child care and student loans."

Grubbs said she also hopes Trump focuses on finances, referencing a recent conversation she said happened between her and a Waffle House waitress.

"I was at a Waffle House on Saturday ... and the servers were talking about how much worse off they are now. And one of the servers was talking about how she had watched all the information on the **Fani Willis** case and just how she can't wait to vote for President Trump. And this is certainly not someone who you would think would be a typical (Trump) voter," Grubbs said.

Johnson said so long as the moderators do their job and Biden speaks directly to the voters, Thursday should be an easy victory for the Democrat.

"I think if he stays true to himself, as far as not getting swayed on what the opposing debater will do, as far as the heckling or the shouting or whatever, and just makes sure that he speaks from his heart as he always does and really answers the question ... President Biden will do a phenomenal job," she said. "And, as we've seen in the press recently how Donald Trump has been going off script and off topic, I think we'll see that as well."

Grubbs just hopes that Trump pulls no punches, despite facing off against someone she believes has "cognitive difficulties."

"I think if (Trump) comes out of the gate too hard, people are gonna go 'Oh, he shouldn't have taken advantage, he's being terrible to an elderly old man.' Well, that's the leader of the free world, and if he can't take what Trump has to dish out, then he doesn't need to be the president," Grubbs said.

Whether you agree with Grubbs or see eye to eye with Johnson, there's a debate watch party for you.

Cobb GOP is hosting an event at Smyrna gun store Adventure Outdoors in conjunction with the DeKalb, Fulton and Georgia GOPs, as well as Turning Point Action, Tea Party Patriots Action and Trump Force 47.

The free festivities will begin at 7 p.m. — but Grubbs said pre-registration is required by 5 p.m. Wednesday.

The Cobb Democrats will start rallying at 7:30 p.m. at Luckey's BBQ Place in Marietta. The \$34 ticket comes with one free drink, some tapas and the chance to see a "surprise guest or two," Johnson said.

For more information on either event, visit the respective party's website at cobbcountyrepublicanparty.wildapricot.org or cobbdemocrats.org.

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THE NATHAN WADE SHOW: Former Fulton County special prosecutor **Nathan Wade** continues to raise eyebrows, this time in an appearance with **Marlon Wayans** on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," last week.

The panelists on Fox 5's "The Georgia Gang" blasted Wade's appearance on their weekly program Sunday.

Media consultant **Lori Geary** called Wade's interview "bizarre," noting how Wayans "did not hold back about Wade's relationship with District Attorney **Fani Willis**, even asking about sexual positions. This was just an embarrassing interview for Wade, and so disrespectful, Cathy, I thought, to Fani Willis," Geary said, turning to panelist **Cathy Woolard**, a public affairs consultant and former Atlanta City Council member.

"I thought so too," Woolard said. "I can't believe he didn't leave the room on the first statement. If he had been any sort of gentleman and not been thinking about himself at all he would have gotten up and left the room and not come back. And why anyone would go to an interview like that and not expect that it was going to turn into some kind of sideshow like that, I don't have any idea. But let me say it again: Nathan, go home. We don't want to see you anymore."

Added Geary: "And stay home. We said that last week."

Phil Kent, publisher of James Magazine, said he seconded that motion.

"I'm sure that Fani Willis doesn't appreciate all of this. And you can bet that the Trump attorneys that want to remove Fani Willis and her office from the current so-called racketeering case here in Georgia are getting everything that they can from Wade. I mean, if he can't answer a basic question like 'When did your affair start? What was the date?' And then freaks out, he has no business really doing any of this stuff. He's damaging Fani Willis' case."

Alisha Thomas Searcy, a Democrat who formerly represented Austell in the Georgia House, was equally dismayed.

"I was utterly disgusted by watching this video, almost to the point where I wanted to cry," Searcy said on the panel. "Because it's unimaginable to watch such disrespect of the process, of a person who you say is your friend. This is the district attorney that you have gone on national television and made a mockery of. And so, I'm so disappointed, so hurt, and I wish that Nathan would just stop. We are continuing to lose sight that this case is arguably the most consequential legal case we will see in our lifetimes. And it is being screwed up, frankly, by indiscretion and poor decision making. It just needs to stop."

Martha Zoller, a conservative radio host for WDUN, rounded out the denunciation by calling it "just poor judgment."

"I mean, he gets up and walks away from a CNN interview but he sits there and takes it on 'The Daily Show.' I don't get it," Zoller said.

Wade has a number of connections to Cobb County. Once an assistant solicitor in the county, Wade was named in a 2020 lawsuit against former Cobb Sheriff **Neil Warren** for allegedly keeping information about Cobb jail inmate deaths from 11Alive. A decade before that lawsuit, Wade was the first Black man named an associate judge on the Marietta Municipal Court by Mayor **Steve Tumlin** in 2010.

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ON THE RIGHT: The Trump Campaign, the Republican National Committee, and the Georgia Republican Party will host the grand opening of the Trump Force 47 office in Cobb County Wednesday.

Trump Force 47 describes itself "as the official army of volunteer neighborhood organizers working together to defeat Joe Biden and the far-left liberal democrats."

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, at 2440 Sandy Plains Rd, Building #10. For more info: Trumpforce47@gagop.org.

While Cobb County Democrats gathered to celebrate the opening of a campaign office for Joe Biden's reelection efforts down the road from Kennestone Hospital earlier this month in an event that was open to the press, the Trump campaign is not following suit, noting this event is closed to media.

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ON THE LEFT: During the Cobb Democratic Party's monthly meeting on