

OPINION

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First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Guest Editorial

Kentucky must make data centers pay their own way

By Roger Ford and Erin Petrey

Artificial intelligence (AI) is dominating headlines, earnings reports, and social media. It's already reshaping the American economy, for better or worse, impacting industries from education to healthcare to defense. And with AI comes the data centers that power it. If Kentucky can benefit from this industry, we must do so with our eyes wide open and with appropriate guardrails in place.

The Department of Energy reports that electricity used by the U.S. data center industry rose from 58 terawatt-hours in 2014 to 176 terawatt-hours in 2023. By 2028, data centers could consume up to 580 terawatt-hours annually - roughly 12% of all U.S. electricity.

When that kind of demand hits the grid, it affects generation, transmission, substations, water systems, utility planning, and ultimately the monthly bills paid by Kentucky families and businesses.

The rapid expansion of data centers isn't simply about technology. It's about energy, water, utility rates, and, in Eastern Kentucky, about whether communities that already sacrificed so much to make others rich will be asked to do so again. Eastern Kentucky knows this story all too well. Outside capital came here before promising jobs and growth, all in the name of development. But it was a false promise. The wealth left, while the costs lingered.

Speed without safeguards has a long history of leaving regular people with the bill. Kentucky must not hand a blank check to every power-hungry project promising to usher in a new age of prosperity via AI. There are some valid uses of high-performance computing (HPC) and AI, many of which are already part of our current technology landscape, especially if they help deliver critical services like healthcare access or real job growth. Some projects may serve a genuine public purpose, such as facilitating remote work, more rapidly detecting cybersecurity threats, or optimizing energy systems. However, other applications like cryptomining and digital asset arbitrage are just cash grabs dressed up as economic development.

On May 26, TeraWulf announced a 1GW hyperscale AI and HPC development at the Muskie Data Campus in Eastern Kentucky. A 1GW data center campus near Ashland isn't just another ribbon-cutting but a major power-policy event. It will require as much continuous electricity as is needed to power about 750,000 Kentucky homes, more than exists in the entire region. Kentucky simply does not have the rules, regulations, or public-interest safeguards in place before projects of this size move forward. It's the Wild West.

During the 2026 session, Kentucky lawmakers discussed legislation intended to protect power customers from subsidizing the enormous demands of data centers. That effort failed, putting Kentuckians at a disadvantage and allowing data center development before establishing a serious statewide framework to protect all impacted parties and expose hidden costs.

Frankfort should pass a bipartisan Kentucky Data Center Responsibility Act before any new data center receives tax incentives, expedited approvals, or utility commitments that could expose existing ratepayers to stranded costs. In other words, we must prevent higher bills for Kentuckians by avoiding sweetheart deals for data center developers.

Kentucky should also establish a large-load tariff through the Public Service Commission, including minimum demand charges, long-term contracts, exit fees, performance bonds, and stranded-cost protections. Independent power producers should be allowed to develop behind-the-meter generation, private microgrids, islanded power systems, and dedicated energy parks that serve data centers without destabilizing the broader grid.

Local governments must benefit through public-private energy partnerships, land leases, special energy districts, franchise fees, or community benefit agreements. Projects seeking tax incentives must demonstrate significant public benefit and should never become public risk.

Kentucky must require full transparency on ownership, financing, foreign involvement, power source, water use, efficiency standards, and especially public health and community impacts before any further data centers are greenlit. Eastern Kentucky - and the rest of the Commonwealth - cannot become another sacrifice making outsiders wealthy while leaving regular Kentuckians to clean up after them.

Carter County Times

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Storybook weddings often happen, so how about a Storybook funeral?

Yes, that's exactly what occurred in Morehead last Sunday afternoon at the funeral of Allen "Styx" Hicks, a longtime "super fan" of Bluegrass music in general and of Rhonda Vincent in particular.

Lo and behold, the "Queen of Bluegrass" rolled up in her tour bus at Northcutt and Son Home for Funerals where she and members of her band, The Rage, performed two songs during the service. Hicks, 63, a retired postmaster, lost a two-year battle with cancer.

He had become a celebrity himself as the enthusiastic fan in the front row at Bluegrass concerts throughout Eastern Kentucky and elsewhere. He had more than 4,000 Facebook friends and greeted many prominent and local Bluegrass musicians by first name.

Although Vincent had been aware of Hicks' death, no public notice was given of her participation in his funeral. Like many others, I assumed she was on tour and perhaps might divert her bus to Morehead for the funeral.

To her credit and as evidence of her warm regard for Hicks, she had no performances scheduled that weekend and apparently came to Morehead from one

of her homes in Nashville or Missouri.

My friend Styx had commissioned the building of a new Silverangel Poppy mandolin by Ken Ratcliff and Danning Wang, his apprentice, to be presented to Vincent later this month as a birthday present. Instead, it was uncased at the funeral home and played by Vincent in both songs.

Also performing during the funeral were local Bluegrass artists Scott Tackett, Billie Renee, and David Carroll.

Rhonda and The Rage will be back in Morehead on Friday, June 26, to perform at RudyFest on Poppy Mountain, east of Morehead on U.S. 60.

It was my honor to deliver his eulogy at the funeral and, honestly, it was a thrill to be on the same platform with a Grammy winner/Grand Ole Opry member and, most importantly, with a famous, classy lady who surely appreciates her fans.

For that overflow audience of friends of Styx and other fans of Bluegrass music, yes, it truly was a Storybook funeral.

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Keith Kappes
Columnist
Carter County Times

And we're back... just in time for Pride and pandemics

It's everyone's favorite month: June! AKA Gay Pride. And while someone in your life will invariably declare it "straight pride" or quote the Bible, you should probably roll your eyes because who cares? What, two nice men are giving your frumpy wife a makeover or someone at the department store explains why a boxy dress shirt looks awful on you? Move on with your righteousness. Kentuckiana will happen and the boys will be in hot pants, and the ladies will be in baseball caps. No one will get hurt and life will go on. If anything, you know who benefits? Local businesses. I don't know if you've looked around lately, but most of us are broke and could use the cash.

Because there are bigger things to worry about than who is wearing what.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, those USAID cuts we made back in 2025 are now colliding with an Ebola outbreak. The lessons of COVID, Ebola, and every major outbreak is simple: public health is a team sport. An "America First" approach to disease prevention is self-defeating because the fastest way to protect Americans is often to stop an outbreak before it leaves someone else's backyard. We didn't get refund checks from those cuts. We didn't see cheaper groceries. We didn't see lower rents. What we got was a weaker public health response and more money poured into conflict abroad.

The war with Iran is shaping up to be another ex-

pensive mess. The administration thought the regime would fold. It hasn't. Every day this drags on cost taxpayers money that could be spent solving problems here at home. We don't have affordable housing. We don't have universal healthcare. Infrastructure is crumbling in communities across the country. Yet somehow there's always money available when it's time to launch missiles.

Inflation is still high. Gas prices still suck. Insurance premiums keep climbing. Rent keeps turning into a bloodsport because most of us can't afford to buy a home and never will thanks to literally everything being on fire around us all the time. The average person isn't sitting around wondering about geopolitical strategy.

The system is broken. This isn't about left or right. It's a matter of the working class getting hosed while we line up for the next splash. And yet, people are frothing at the mouth in comments sections on Facebook over gay pride festivals? Bro. Grow up. Look at how your Senators smile in your face and deny any meaningful legislation. Carter County doesn't need another culture war. It needs jobs that let young people stay, affordable housing, and healthcare people can actually afford to use. Yet somehow we're expected to spend our energy arguing about drag queens instead of asking why so many of our kids leave and never come back.

This is a math problem.

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Robert Dean
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Carter County Times

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The Times welcomes all letters to the editor.

Letters should be limited to 300 words or less. Letters should focus on issues that affect the community as a whole, and not personal or business disputes.

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