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

The data center fight in Kentucky is about democracy

By Jason Bailey
Kentucky Lantern

In a state short of jobs, outsiders promising big investments typically receive a red-carpet welcome from Kentucky public officials. That was no doubt the expectation when Big Tech companies began scouting data center locations in the commonwealth. But when the trickle of interest became a flood, and when the proposals swelled from small data centers to massive hyperscale complexes, concerned residents began speaking out.

Now, at least 30 Kentucky counties have put in place ordinances or moratoria on new data centers. Local officials may have lost their seats over supporting data centers in the May primary elections. And Governor Beshear recently withheld praise for a $100 billion data center in Paducah, with his office citing concerns about energy costs, environmental impacts and fair taxation.

Americans rarely agree on much, but there is sudden, shared anger about data centers across the political spectrum. What's this shift about?

One source is widespread frustration with the impacts of Big Tech on society. Many rightly believe that the largest corporations in the world are stealing our data, surveilling our lives and addicting our children. Tech CEOs proudly predict that artificial intelligence will eliminate many jobs while also admitting AI has a chance of ending humanity.

And people understandably seethe at the lack of accountability and transparency when it comes to data centers, whose developers use backroom lobbying and non-disclosure agreements with local officials to keep the public in the dark.

The anger is also about affordability. Frustration with the cost of living makes Americans concerned about anything that can make utility bills rise further. Kentuckians are already paying more for electricity because our utilities buy energy from the regional supplier PJM whose charges are billions of dollars higher because of data centers.

And when it comes to potential harms to air, water and quality of life, Kentuckians have ample experience with powerful corporations damaging human health and the land with impunity.

Kentuckians have also been burned by companies like Braidy Industries and AppHarvest that made big promises and received public money before they flopped. The state doesn't need to lure data centers with tax breaks. Cheap land, plentiful water, low electricity prices, central grid access and favorable climate make Kentucky a prime location already. Nevertheless, in the waning hours of the 2025 legislative session, state lawmakers gave data centers a massively lucrative sales tax exemption on the purchase of equipment. And then in 2026, lawmakers failed to pass legislation that could keep data center utility costs from being shifted to residents.

The 2025 tax break will last 50 years and could easily cost billions of dollars if given to just a few hyperscale centers in Kentucky. And at the same time data centers are promising local tax benefits for communities, their lawyers are seeking to get those taxes reduced or eliminated as well.

While AI will no doubt play a significant role in society, some question the transformative vision touted by tech billionaires. The build-out of data centers is fueled by debt and rivals the size of the interstate highway system and the Space Race. But the profitability of AI at that enormous scale is unproven. A bubble in AI stock prices could leave communities with stranded energy systems to pay for and a repeat of the dot-com bust of 2001.

As always, Kentuckians want and need jobs. Data centers offer significant short-term employment in construction even while their long-term jobs are few and of lower quality.

But Kentuckians may finally be fed up with the promises of faraway developers and their backers in the Bluegrass. We've been told to accept whatever comes and assured that the benefits will trickle down. We've been told that creating a good "business climate" is all that matters — even if it means profits on the backs of workers, communities and the places people hold dear.

Maybe what Kentuckians are asking for is economic development on their terms. Sounds like a true democracy, and what a fine idea that could be.

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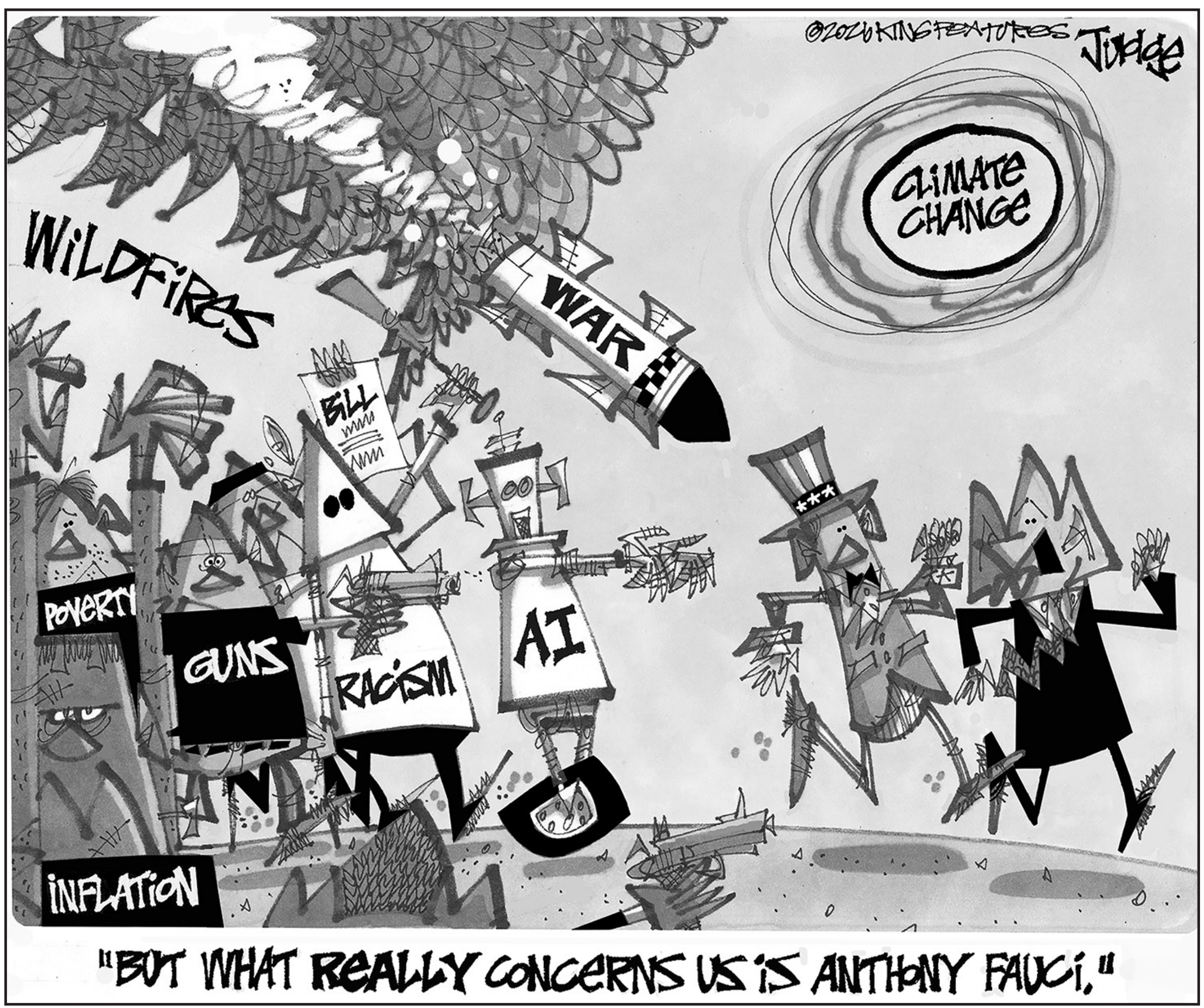
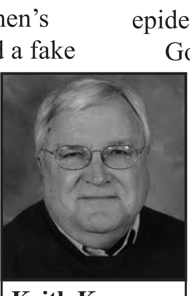


Could it be true that loneliness has become the silent killer of men?



Keith Kappes
Columnist
Carter County Times

I was shocked Sunday morning during a men's bible class when a man told us that he created a fake name when he had to identify an emergency contact person for his employer in case he was injured or became ill at work.

He said he was single and had no living relatives or even casual friends or acquaintances that he could ask to look after his interests if he were to become incapacitated for any reason.

I estimated his age at about 60 and he appeared to be in good health. I'm ashamed to admit that I've seen him in that class several times but still do not know his name, where he lives or anything else about him.

By the time the class ended, I had decided that I would offer my services as his emergency contact. However, I saw him exchanging contact information with two other men who apparently reacted sooner than me.

But I thought of another person who is retired and now serving as full-time caregiver for his disabled wife. I am reaching out to him before this week is over.

Today's class discussion about sharing our Christian values by helping others included my first exposure to a social problem called "male loneliness epidemic."

Google's Gemini AI showed that men and women report being lonely at basically the same rates of 15 to 20 percent. But that men commit 80 percent of the suicides in the U.S., attributed primarily to social disconnect and untreated distress.

According to data from the Survey Center on American Life, the proportion of men reporting having no close friends quadrupled from three percent in 1990 to 15 percent in recent years.

Men rely far more heavily on a romantic partner or spouse for emotional support than women do. Pew Research findings indicate that roughly three-quarters of men turn to a partner first when facing emotional difficulty, whereas women maintain wider, active networks of friends and family.

The Pew folks noted that single, divorced, or widowed men are therefore at a much higher risk of total isolation. As a widower since 2022, I will stop challenging my children's concerns about me spending too much time alone in an empty house.

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Hats off to the last of the makers

Robert Dean
Guest Columnist
Carter County Times

I keep thinking about Batsakes Hat Shop.

Batsakes will lock its doors in September, ending nearly 120 years downtown and the working life of Gus Miller, one of the last traditional hatmakers in the country. Miller's uncles Pete and George founded it in 1907; he arrived from a Greek village at 17 in 1951 and swept floors and shined shoes before learning to block felt by hand. He's 93 — he says 94 — still gets up at four, doesn't drive, and his wife Rita brings him in every morning.

Guys don't wear a hat like they used to, and that's like many things in this world: we don't call repairmen to fix the television; we throw it out. And the people capable of fixing something are getting fewer and further between, because companies don't want someone from the outside to learn what's inside, just like our cars.

I don't have to explain this to you, but the economy is not good. Last week, the Labor Department reported that employment unexpectedly shrank by 23,000 positions last month — compared with the 83,000 gain that economists had forecast. They also revised reports from May and June down by a combined 103,000 jobs.

The Labor Department also reported that hourly earnings for nonsupervisory and production workers fell by a tenth of a percent over the last year when adjusted for inflation. Inflation-adjusted weekly earnings had moved up in the year ending in June, but those gains came with a similar increase in the average number of hours worked — a signal that plenty of folks are barely getting by.

Back in the Spring, the White House fought analysts on the presumption that the only real job gains were coming from one specific sector: AI data centers. Politicos want to say that the construction economy is booming – sure, because they're building stuff no one wants.

We've been thrust into a world that is always trying to extract more blood from more stones, even when the rock patch ain't got much left in terms of give.

Sooner rather than later, Gus Miller will turn the key at Batsakes for the last time. The display cases will go. The hats will go. Someone will take the sign to hang in their new tacky faux "culture" observant bar. And Cincinnati will still have plenty of places to buy something to put on your head. That isn't the point. What disappears is a place where a man could spend his entire adult life learning how to make one thing well and where doing that could sustain a business for more than a century.

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