

Nuclear Energy Jobs on the 2020 Georgia Ballot

By Rich Powell, Executive Director [ClearPath Action](#)

As the national political landscape clouds the election cycle, Georgians need to think about their local clean sky future. The political buzzwords we all hear surrounding climate policy such as the Green New Deal, California wildfires, and the ban on hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” probably are not the first things you think about when voting for local officials in Georgia. But, one of the biggest and brightest spots for Georgia’s clean energy future is on the ballot – the future of Plant Vogtle.

Why does Vogtle matter? The first new U.S. nuclear reactor site since 1979 already has 7,000 workers on site near Waynesboro, Georgia, with an estimated 800 permanent well-paying jobs once it’s operational.

Georgians currently get just over a [quarter](#) of their electricity needs from clean nuclear power. That’s higher than the national average of roughly 20 percent. Southern Company estimates that 34 percent of its total southeastern energy portfolio will come from nuclear power over the next 3 years.

Maintaining America’s leadership in nuclear energy also allows us to mount competitive bids for nuclear exports internationally. Some developing nations in Africa and Asia with large power demand are increasingly turning to China for their energy needs. Maintaining a strong nuclear industry will keep America competitive.

Something you probably don’t know — Georgia is already a leader in reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions — one of the main culprits behind climate change. According to the [World Resources Institute](#) (WRI), Georgia ranks 5th out of all 50 states in reducing CO2 emissions. Between 2005 and 2017, Georgians reduced CO2 by 28 percent. And no, that did not come at the expense of economic growth — in the same time frame, Georgians saw 16 percent growth in the state’s gross domestic product (GDP). Lastly, WRI finds that Georgia is in the rare air of states that both saw a major improvement *and* have better than average emissions now – outperforming the climate record of much vaunted states like California.

Georgia really is a model for the rest of the country on how to reduce CO2 emissions while simultaneously expanding an economy. There is no doubt that a strong nuclear fuel mix is a major factor in that success.

Success of the nuclear energy industry will certainly benefit from smart policy decisions from policymakers at the federal, state and local levels that allow it to remain a competitive energy source.

On the federal side, the Congressional delegation led by former Senator Johnny Isakson, has historically supported policies like advanced R&D, loan guarantees from the U.S. Department of Energy, and fixing the nuclear production tax incentive — known as 45J in the federal energy

tax code. 45J freed up the credit to be used not just to help complete the Plant Vogtle AP1000 reactor project, but also to develop advanced technologies – the future of nuclear energy.

Locally, officials have more riding on their shoulders to ensure the successful completion of Vogtle with smart state investments and regulatory certainty.

Governor Brian Kemp, the majority of state legislators, and current Georgia Public Service Commissioners are up to the task and are committed to get Vogtle over the goal line. Chuck Eaton, Tim Echols, Lauren “Bubba” McDonald, Tricia Pridemore and Jason Shaw all understand that more nuclear energy in Georgia means more jobs, more clean energy and more reliable electricity. McDonald and Shaw are up for reelection, and both face challengers who have not fully embraced nuclear energy.

Without nuclear energy, Georgia’s impressive rank as one of the best climate change fighting states could be at risk. Without nuclear energy, Georgia’s impressive GDP growth and job creation may be in jeopardy. Without nuclear energy, supplying customers with 24/7 reliable sources of affordable clean power would be much harder.

Political affiliation won’t impact your electric bill or prevent your lights from going out. But, voting for candidates who support nuclear jobs and clean, reliable energy will help Georgia remain a national leader.

Rich Powell leads ClearPath Action, a clean energy innovation organization who takes no money from industry.