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ALERT TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT TOPICAL

ENERGY CROSSROADS

Why Virginians are paying billions for Dominion's data center gas plant | Guest column

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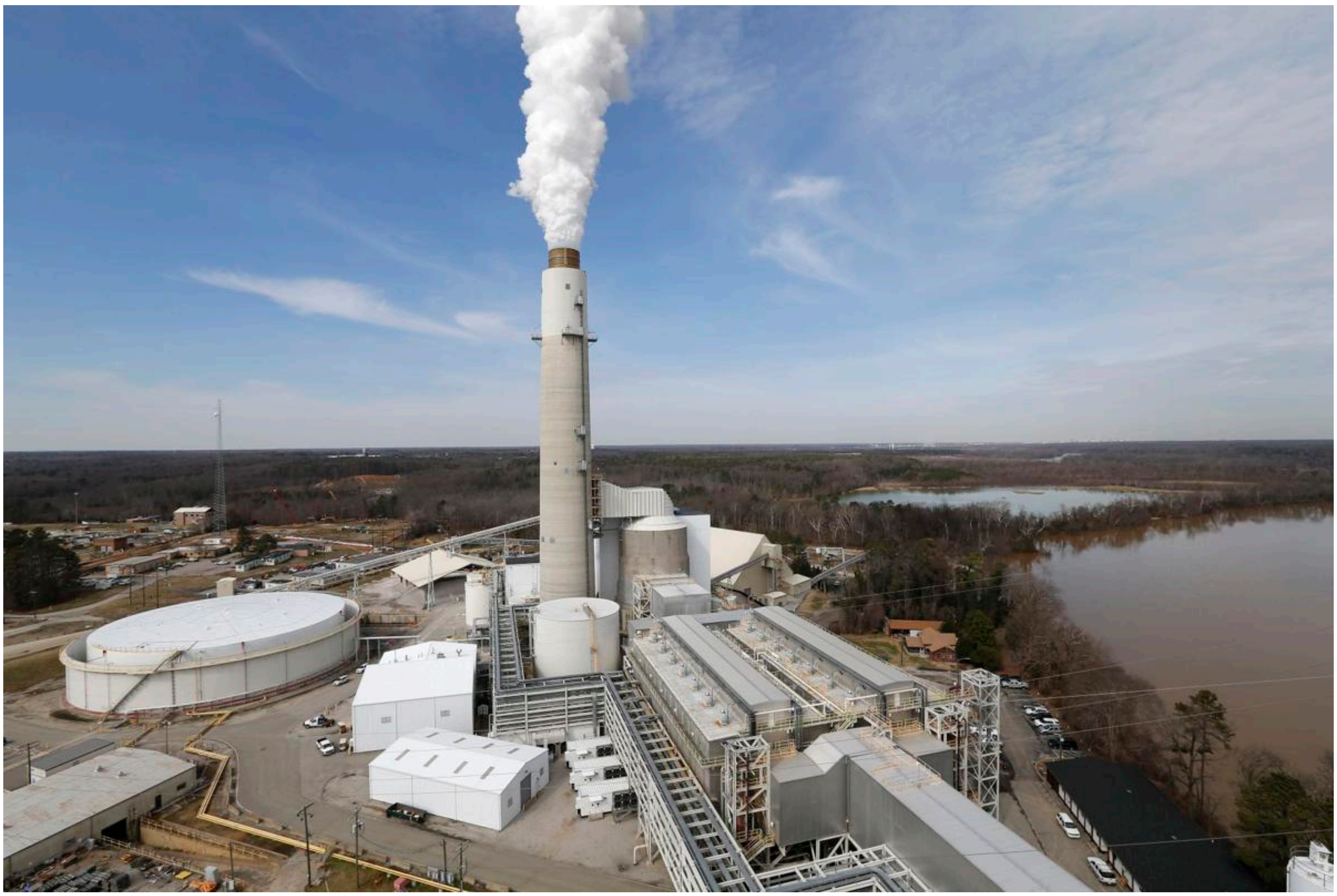

Dominion's plan to build one of the nation's largest gas plants in Cumberland County — a costly, volatile, data-center-driven project that would leave Virginians footing the bill despite far cheaper, steadier clean-energy alternatives — is exactly the kind of backward decision families can no longer afford, writes Victoria Higgins.

ALEXA WELCH EDLUND, TIMES-DISPATCH

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Make it make sense: at a time when Virginians’ bills are being hit by **soaring fuel costs**, yet again tied to never-ending wars overseas, Dominion is proposing what would be the second-largest gas plant in the United States. Never mind that clean energy is both **cheaper** and its fuel-free, unlimited and unaffected by foreign affairs. You and I will finance this unnecessary three-gigawatt behemoth in Cumberland County, and AI data centers will use the electricity.

Dominion keeps repeating the false claim that “Virginians” are using more electricity. It’s simply not true — residential electricity demand is relatively unchanged in recent years. **Over 90% of projected demand is from data centers**. In the absence of Big Tech leeching ever more electricity from our collective grid, the insanely oversized Cumberland Gas Plant would look even more like what it is — a cash grab.

It’s a winning formula if you’re a wealthy CEO like Bob Blue, who in 2025 made **$15,219,108**, including a $4.5 million bonus and $9 million in stock awards. Data centers increase statewide electric demand, your company builds enormously expensive gas infrastructure to serve them, and captive Virginia customers pay you back, plus a handsome profit. Better yet, all of the risk of volatile gas fuel costs goes directly to households and other electric customers.

So if you’re already struggling to pay — or not paying, and risking eviction in **one of the highest eviction-rate states in the country** — your electric bill, well, that’s a bummer. Dominion is about to add more fuel charges, and on top of that, it wants you to finance their newest enormous gas plant, plus interest, to serve data center electric demand. It's all just cash under the mattress to Bob Blue and Mark Zuckerberg.

Exactly how much will this gargantuan plant cost you and me? We don't have the exact numbers yet, but consider that the recently approved 1-gigawatt Chesterfield gas plant, large for a gas plant but diminutive in comparison to Cumberland, is projected to cost ratepayers **over $8 billion** once fuel and Dominion profits are added to already billion-dollar construction costs. Common sense would indicate that Cumberland, three times as large, could cost us three times as much. Just checking — could you and your neighbors maybe cobble together $24 billion? Zuckerberg and friends could really use the favor.

To add injury to insult, on top of the added costs to your electric bill, gas plants like Chesterfield and Cumberland are an insidious, often invisible adder to annual healthcare costs. Indeed, a **Southern Environmental Law Center report** found that pollutants like fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from the smaller Chesterfield plant would saddle Virginians with an additional $3.5 billion in health costs.

Virginia is charting a cleaner, more affordable energy future, but massive projects like Dominion Energy's Chesterfield and Cumberland gas plants put that commitment to the test as families struggle with rising costs and mounting corporate-driven energy demands, writes Victoria Higgins.

MIKE KROPF,TIMES-DISPATCH

A few years ago, the war in Ukraine sent gas costs spiking. We will continue to pay those fuel costs for decades, because policymakers chose to **spread them out over time** as opposed to causing sudden short-term increases. This was, of course, before data center demand caused massive short-term increases anyway.

Now, the United States' foray in Iran has caused oil and gas costs to once again skyrocket (by the way, Shell reported **$7 billion in profit** last quarter, up 24% from last year). So long as Dominion continues to choose volatile, costly gas over local, affordable clean energy, these deferred fuel costs will continue to stack onto one another for decades — locking today's foreign conflicts into decades and decades of high energy bills.

What’s maddening is that there is very clearly a better way. Clean energy has rapidly become the lowest-cost source of electricity in the world, with solar and wind costs falling dramatically over the past decade. The International Energy Agency has called solar power “**the cheapest electricity in history**.” As technology improves and battery storage becomes cheaper, experts expect clean energy prices to continue declining, making renewable power even more affordable for homes and businesses.

The good news is that Virginia lawmakers have wisely chosen to chart a long-term path towards a more stable, clean energy future, and Gov. Abigail Spanberger has made energy affordability a major focus of her tenure. But decision points like Chesterfield and Cumberland test policymakers’ commitment to affordability in real time. Virginia families quite literally cannot afford to keep shelling out billions for corporate profits, volatile fuel prices and endless new data center demand. We must ask that these policies and campaign commitments to people over corporate profit hold fast.

Victoria Higgins

Provided

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