

POWER4Georgians Remains Committed to Plant Washington

Atlanta, September 2011 - The recent hearing by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) concerning two minor aspects of the proposed air permit for Plant Washington is yet another sign that the \$2.1 billion project is continuing to move forward.

There are literally hundreds of conditions in Plant Washington's air permit – requirements designed to ensure that the plant will be fully protective of human health and the environment. Although opponents objected to the stringent air permit EPD issued for Plant Washington in 2010, an administrative law judge found that only two provisions needed additional work.

The purpose of the EPD hearing was to address those two highly technical emissions requirements (dealing only with how to *measure* emissions, not the emissions levels themselves) – that and nothing else. Accordingly, any general comments expressed in favor of or in opposition to the project were irrelevant and non-actionable as they did not pertain to the actual purpose of the hearing. Nonetheless, opponents of Plant Washington used the opportunity to make broad and non-factual statements in their pleas for the EPD to stop the project.

What's not irrelevant are opponents' ongoing attempts to stop a \$2.1 billion investment that promises to have far-reaching economic benefits. At a time when Georgia – like the nation – is in need of jobs, Plant Washington will provide them: up to 1,600 construction jobs over the four-year construction period paying over \$250 million in total wages and benefits, up to 130 full time permanent on-site jobs paying over \$7 million in annual wages and benefits when the plant is operational, and another 200 to 300 new secondary and spin-off jobs.

That's in addition to the near doubling of Washington County's tax digest that will result from Plant Washington – allowing local leaders and citizens to enjoy more funding for schools, public safety, parks and other community amenities that enhance the quality of life and make the area more attractive to other businesses.

Unfortunately opponents of the project – many of whom do not even live in Washington County – continue to be more concerned about pushing a no-coal political agenda than in the economic well-being of the citizens of Sandersville and surrounding communities. That's an easy position to take when you live in Atlanta and have a job – even if your job is only to fight affordable energy.

Leaders in Monroe County, home of Plant Scherer, tell a much different story. Connie Ham, chair of the Forsyth-Monroe County Chamber, calls the Georgia Power-operated plant a “blessing” for the community, noting that it keeps their citizens' taxes much lower than what people in surrounding communities pay. Georgia Power used the Ocmulgee River to build Lake Juliette, the water source for Plant Scherer. “The fish that come out of Lake Juliette – primarily Bass, Crappie and Bream – have been fished for years and they're safe to eat. Absolutely, people have been eating fish from the lake for years.”

Monroe County Commission chair James Vaughn echoes that sentiment, saying that the plant provides good paying jobs and helps make up a “very large portion” of the county's tax digest. Both leaders laud the utility's environmental stewardship and generous community support.

Of course, these types of issues – jobs and economic growth – are far outside the scope of EPD's work, or any hearing it might hold on Plant Washington's air permit. Plant Washington supporters understand that. Jobs also are clearly well outside opponents' area of concern, which perhaps explains their attempt to hijack the EPD hearing to push a political, pro-regulation, no-coal agenda.

In the end, POWER4Georgians remains confident that Plant Washington will be constructed – and it will be one of the cleanest coal-powered energy facilities in the nation. While a vocal minority seems willing to go to almost any lengths to stop the project, a much quieter larger majority continues to wait for the plant, the jobs and the economic benefits it will provide. Those in the latter group should know that POWER4Georgians remains committed to developing Plant Washington – and to bringing good paying jobs to the area and affordable electricity to thousands of Georgians.