

Opinion/Guest column: McGovern fights data centers' threat to climate

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We are living in an era when unbridled capitalism is damaging our environment, accelerating climate change and having an immediate negative impact on public health. These urgent problems need to be addressed. Now more than ever, we the people need a voice in government.

We are very fortunate to have this voice in U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern. Historically he does more than vote on bills in a manner that will help

his constituents. As our advocate and spokesperson, he often introduces or cosponsors them. He places the basic needs and rights of his constituents over corporate interests and his own political gain. This is further evinced through his refusal to accept corporate PAC funding.

McGovern recently met with eight people from the Worcester-area chapter of Climate Hope Affiliates to discuss data center regulations and the importance of the EPA, particularly its interface with environmental justice.

During this meeting, it became instantly clear that McGovern understands the enormity of the problems associated with the current expansion of data centers. Throughout our country, millions of Americans are faced with increased electric bills due to the huge electrical demands of these centers. The astronomical energy requirements of these centers potentially will accelerate climate change unless they are mandated to generate their electricity from fossil fuel-free sources.

The environmental justice implications of these centers are tremendous as they are rapidly being constructed in underserved communities, resulting in further public health burdens for our fellow Americans.

In a democracy, data center expansion should not be a runaway train. There are currently two critical pieces of legislation that can apply brakes to their rapid expansion and environmental impact.

One bill is the Data Center Transparency Act (H.R. 6984). This would require the EPA to collect data on a data center's water consumption, utility costs, water and air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. This is important at many levels. Climate goals locally and nationally

will become impossible to meet if the enormous carbon output of these centers is to continue.

At the level of our neighborhoods, those who live near these centers can and will develop medical conditions associated with breathing the heavily polluted air which is generated by these data centers. This is most evident in a neighborhood in East Memphis, Tennessee, where SpaceXAI operates its Colossus supercomputer.

One of the goals of SpaceXAI is to land people on Mars. This endeavor depends on Colossus for the necessary mathematical calculations, and this reasoning is used to justify its size and ability to ignore the Clean Air Act and any other legal requirements for air quality and building permits.

Since the electrical grid in Memphis was unable to support Colossus' extraordinary electrical needs, SpaceXAI quickly made its own power plant. This plant generates electricity by burning methane, thus releasing formaldehyde and high amounts of particulate matter into the surrounding neighborhood. Respiratory illnesses including asthma and COPD are now developing far more frequently in this neighborhood than before the center was built.

The Preventing Rate Inflation in Consumer Energy, or PRICE, Act ([H.R. 6983](#)) could circumvent problems that are emerging in other parts of our country and could also happen right here in Central Massachusetts. The PRICE Act would require data centers to transition to the use of clean energy within a specific time frame.

As one would predict, during his meeting with Climate Hope Affiliates, McGovern stated that he will not only vote “yes” on both the Data Center Transparency Act and the PRICE Act but is also cosponsoring these, as well as other bills that will protect us and our environment from the negative impacts of data center expansion.

At Climate Hope Affiliates, we believe that advocacy through relationships and partnerships is the best possible strategy for working on the climate crisis and helping our neighbors who are victims of environmental injustice. Jim McGovern has always been a champion of these same objectives and we are fortunate to now have him as a partner. He gives us all reason to be hopeful.

Andrea Pereira is a member of Worcester-area Climate Hope Affiliates, a joint initiative of the United Church of Christ and Creation Justice Ministries.