

Data Centers: Protecting Florida Before Profits

It seems like everyone is talking about data centers these days - those massive, warehouse-like facilities filled with powerful computers that keep our digital world running. Proposals for these facilities are popping up all over the United States, including right here in Florida's 21st congressional district.

What Data Centers Do

Data centers power artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and the massive amounts of data we rely on every day. Whether you're ordering something online, streaming a movie, or asking ChatGPT or Alexa a question, you're using a data center.

There's no question that this technology has transformed our lives, and innovation will continue to shape our future. But innovation should never come without accountability, transparency, or thoughtful planning.

The Rise of Data Centers in the United States

As the popularity and uses for AI grow, more data centers are being built. To give you an idea of how large these centers can be, in May of this year, Utah approved a data center spanning roughly 40,000 acres, more than twice the size of Manhattan.

Closer to home, here in congressional district 21, [several data center proposals](#) have either passed or are awaiting approval. These include two in Martin County (both pending) and one in St. Lucie County (another proposal was withdrawn in February). An approved data center in Loxahatchee has been delayed, in part because of strong community opposition.

The Hidden Costs

Why would a community oppose having a data center located nearby? It turns out that the reasons are many - and substantial.

As someone who has spent my career protecting people as a firefighter and paramedic, I believe those concerns deserve to be heard and not dismissed. While data centers support important technology, they also come with significant impacts that deserve careful consideration.

Data Centers Are Energy & Water Hogs

A data center, even a modest one by modern standards, uses a tremendous amount of electricity, to power thousands of servers and keep them running around the clock. For example, training one AI language model can take more electricity than is needed to power hundreds of homes for a year. These large facilities place tremendous strain on local power grids, increasing demand for new infrastructure and raising questions about long-term energy reliability.

The other resource needed to cool the computers in a data center is water. A data center can consume millions of gallons of water per day. In Florida, clean water is one

of our most precious natural resources, so every major development must consider its impact on our aquifers, our agriculture, and the long-term needs of our growing communities.

Increased Environmental Impact

Many technology companies are investing in cleaner energy, but the rapid expansion of data centers has also led to increased greenhouse gas emissions. In July, Microsoft reported that its greenhouse gas emissions [rose by about 25 percent](#) last year, and Google and Amazon [released similar reports](#). Microsoft Vice Chair and President Brad Smith and Chief Sustainability Officer Melanie Nakagawa said the increase was driven “primarily by the expansion of our datacenter infrastructure.”

There is also the issue of electronic waste. Because technology changes so rapidly, the hardware in data centers becomes obsolete quickly. While some companies recycle responsibly, much of this outdated equipment still ends up in landfills or is shipped overseas, creating additional environmental concerns. Although larger companies report high recycling rates, that is not the case for all businesses. In fact, only 22% of data center e-waste is [properly collected and recycled](#), according to Human I-T, a technology watchdog organization.

Little Job Creation

Despite the massive size of these giant warehouse-like buildings, job creation from data centers is minimal. It takes only a few dozen engineers, security personnel, and technicians to run each one. Communities are often asked to give up hundreds of acres of land, absorb increased demands on infrastructure, and live with industrial-scale facilities that offer relatively limited long-term economic benefits.

The Risk of Fires

It’s also critical to point out the immense fire risks that data centers pose when the proper infrastructure isn’t put into place before construction of a large facility that consumes and emits so much energy.

Data centers house thousands of servers, high-voltage electrical equipment, backup generators, large battery energy storage systems and diesel fuel storage tanks. If a fire breaks out, it can be difficult to control and may burn for extended periods, releasing harmful smoke and vapors into neighboring areas.

That fire will also require millions of gallons of water to be put out. All of these emergency response activities put a burden on taxpayers. I firmly believe communities should not bear the cost of preparing for specialized industrial hazards.

We Must Put Our Communities First

It is for these reasons and risks that I oppose the construction of data centers in our district. Our area is heavily populated in some places and highly rural in others, with large numbers of native animals, birds, and fish. Data centers have the potential to have a huge impact on our environment, our quality of life, and our precious natural resources.

We simply cannot afford to take chances with our health and that of our children and grandchildren simply because a project promises future growth.

As your representative in Congress, I will fight for policies that promote responsible innovation while protecting the communities, natural resources, and way of life that make this area such a special place to call home.

If you share that vision, I hope you'll join our campaign. Whether you [volunteer](#), make a [contribution](#), or simply help spread our message, your support will help us build a future that protects our environment, strengthens our communities, and leaves the next generation an even better South Florida than the one we enjoy today.