

JANUARY 5, 2021 PSC RUNOFF ELECTION

A SOCIALIST'S GUIDE TO VOTING



Metro Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America



WHEN?

Election day
Jan. 5, 2021

Early voting starts
Dec. 14, 2020

WHERE?

Find your
polling place

VOTING ABSENTEE?

Request your
absentee ballot
NOW

Find a ballot
drop-off box

On January 5, 2021, Georgia will hold a run-off election for two U.S. senate races, in addition to a race for the Public Service Commission (PSC) District 4. Democrat Daniel Blackman will face long-time incumbent and Republican Lauren “Bubba” McDonald. This guide is meant to inform voters on PSC race itself, the duties of the Georgia Public Service Commission, and how these issues affect every day Georgians— all from a socialist perspective!

What the heck is the Public Service Commission (PSC)?

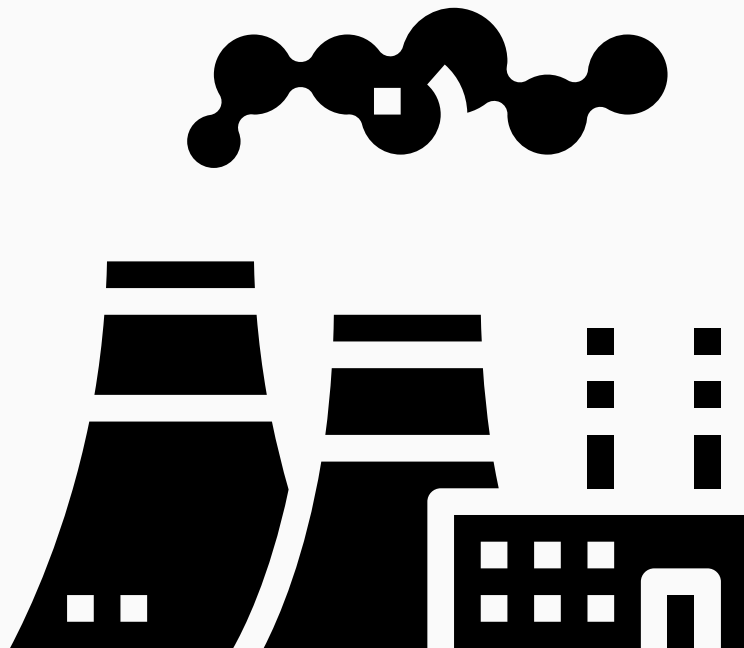
The Georgia Public Service Commission consists of a chairman, vice-chairman, and three commissioners, each elected from one of five districts. Although members of the commission must reside in the district for which they run, they are elected in partisan, statewide elections. Currently, all commission members are Republican. The commission regulates utilities and rates (for Georgia Power and Atlanta Gas Light) throughout the state— specifically electric, natural gas, and telecommunications.

How does the PSC affect everyday Georgians?

DID MY ELECTRIC BILL INCREASE?!

Of Georgia state agencies, the Public Service Commission may most burden the pocketbooks of average residents. As of January 2020, the PSC approved a Georgia Power electric rate hike— which led to an average increase of \$6 a month to Georgians' utility bills— and is set to incrementally increase over the next three years. This increase, which enabled Georgia Power— a regulated monopoly— to collect profit margins well above the national average, was approved by four out of five on the commission. It is expected that low income residents will be most impacted by the increase. Not only is Georgia Power

raking in unearned profits at the expense of low-income Georgians, but rates are expected to accommodate the company's expansion of the long-postponed failure and waste of money, Plant Vogtle

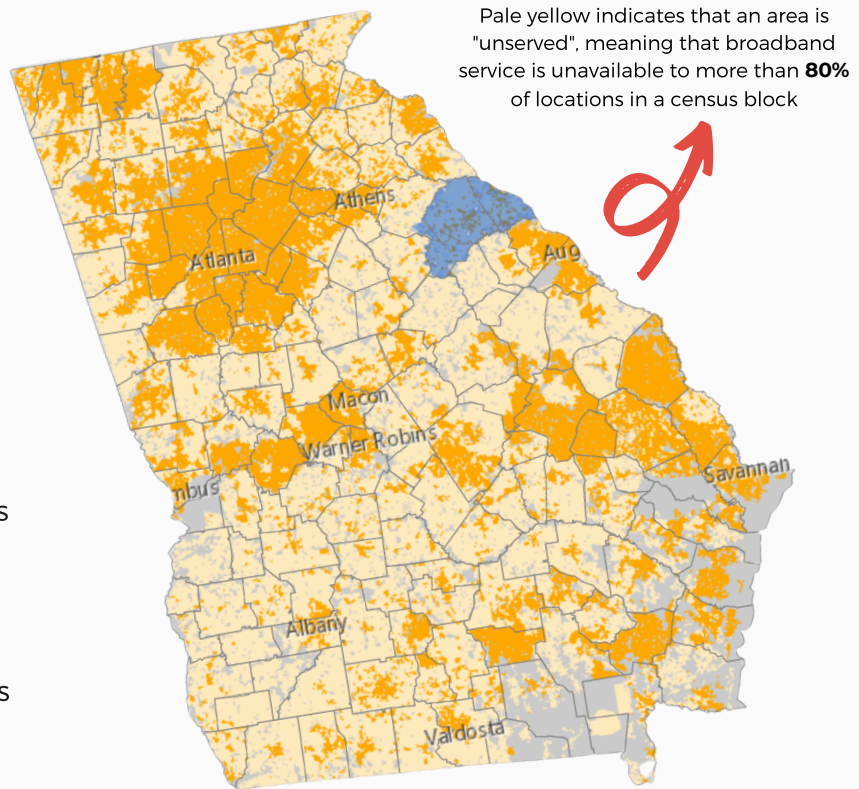


ELECTRICITY OFF FOR THOUSANDS DURING A PANDEMIC...

As a response to mass unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the PSC voted in March to halt disconnections for Georgia residents unable to pay their utility bills. The commission unanimously voted to lift this moratorium on July 15, despite continued elevated unemployment and spread of COVID-19. The lift resulted in electricity shut-offs for over 400,000 customers from mid-July through August. Beginning this October, 132,000 Georgia customers were forced to begin paying past-due balances built up during the moratorium at the risk of having electricity shut off yet again.

Broadband Access for All

Internet is a utility. So, why hasn't the state ensured that all Georgians have equal access to a quality internet connection? The Georgia Department of Community Affairs published a [broadband availability map](#) (right) in September 2020, showing that over 507,000 homes and businesses—largely in rural Georgia—lacked access to a quality broadband connection. During a global pandemic, in which many schools have pivoted to virtual learning, lack of internet takes a harsher toll. The high cost of infrastructure necessary to expand broadband in rural areas renders the GOP's free-market approach to service harmful to a huge portion of the state.



Currently in Georgia, access to basic telephone service is guaranteed universally across the state as a utility, whereas broadband internet is not. Under the [Georgia Broadband Opportunity Act \(HB244\)](#), which goes into effect early 2021, the PSC is required to set rates which incentivize private provider investment in underserved areas. It remains to be seen, however, whether these market incentives will actually lead to private investment. Alternatively, the PSC has the ability to recommend that broadband internet be treated as a utility throughout the state, guaranteeing universal coverage to low income customers, both rural and urban. However, the PSC is unlikely to take this approach under current GOP leadership.

Who are the candidates?

Democrat Daniel Blackman's

platform centers people, not business interests. His goals include protecting Georgia residents against high utility costs and blackouts caused by outdated infrastructure, utility workers against workplace dangers, and providing equitable access to broadband internet to all of 159 of Georgia's counties. He also advocates for strengthening of utility assistance programs for low-income Georgians, and moving Georgia towards cleaner energy sources – while at the same time refusing the influence and money of the fossil fuels industry.



Blackman's background includes advising the Congressional Black Caucus and the Environmental Protection Agency on environmental issues. He also served as Georgia's political director for the Bernie 2016 presidential campaign.

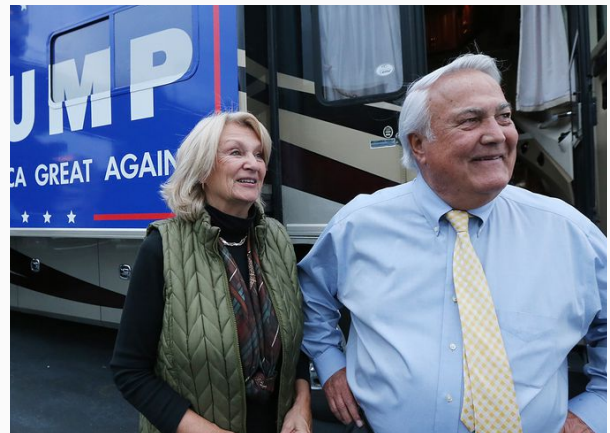
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I feel that when you have someone who understands that Black children have asthma at three times the national rate, and that communities of color are 68% more likely to live in proximity to a fossil fuel facility, when we understand that I think we govern differently.”

— **Daniel Blackman**

Republican incumbent Lauren

“Bubba” McDonald was first appointed to the PSC in 1998, after serving 20 years as a state representative. Though perhaps not the worst on the PSC (the bar is so low it is underground), McDonald is an avid Trump supporter whose platform and record certainly center business interests over people. He's voted repeatedly to continue the funding of failed project Plant Vogtle, allowing Georgia residents (as opposed Georgia Power shareholders) to absorb the



cost. Although he's played a role in Georgia's increased use of solar power, McDonald prefers a "conservative, free market approach", and advocates for solar only when profitable. His primary goal is to keep Georgia an attractive location for business. Meanwhile, The PSC Accountability Project estimates that 85% of McDonald's campaign contributions come from influencers, or companies that benefit from the commission's decisions.