

These Rural Americans Are Trying to Hold Back the Tide of AI Fearing rising utility costs, job losses and privacy violations, residents have blocked or delayed data-center projects around the country

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Howell Township, a conservative farming area in Michigan, is known for being friendly to businesses. But when a developer proposed converting 1,000 acres of farmland into a massive data center for training artificial-intelligence models last year, the community fought back.

The planning commission and county planning commission eventually voted not to advance the project, a potential \$1 billion site for Facebook parent Meta Platforms META and the developer recently withdrew its request after Howell Township put a moratorium on new data-center development.

“I assumed Republicans would be for this: business, deregulation,” said Breanne Green, a community organizer who helped start one of the first Facebook groups there opposing the project. “That just evaporated.”

The battle is part of a nationwide resistance to the AI boom, challenging President Trump and others who have embraced the technology. Fearing rising utility costs, job losses and privacy violations, locals blocked or delayed about 20 projects around the country representing nearly \$100 billion in combined investment in the second quarter of last year, according to Data Center Watch, a research firm tracking the fights.

Many of them belong to tech giants including Meta and Amazon.com, fueling battles from Indiana to Oklahoma. Trump’s industry-friendly AI strategy has received criticism from other Republicans including former strategist Steve Bannon and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who fought a recent executive order aimed at challenging states that pass AI regulations.

“This is a fundamental contradiction that is emerging from the Trump coalition,” said Michael Toscano, a senior fellow at the right-leaning Institute for Family Studies. More than 70% of consumers in the think tank’s recent survey in six Republican or battleground states said they were either concerned about AI or felt it was a big threat. “It’s potentially a very large problem for Republicans that are running in reliably red states” where MAGA voters don’t want to be sidelined in favor of Silicon Valley, he added.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R., Mo.) has also criticized AI companies. “People [are] being subjected to rolling brownouts, because the Silicon Valley data center that is now plumped down in rural Missouri is sucking up all the energy,” Hawley said recently. “That’s outrageous.” Missouri data-center proposals have sparked similar backlash.

The Trump administration and a group of governors recently asked the nation’s largest power-grid operator to take emergency steps to address the issue. The president also praised Microsoft for promising to pay its way on power for its data centers. ChatGPT maker OpenAI made similar pledges.

“We don’t think taxpayers should be asked to pay the burden, especially at the local level, for something that instead should be providing benefits,” Microsoft Vice Chair and President Brad Smith said in a recent interview.

A Meta spokesman said the company works with electricity providers to pay its way on energy while making local investments in the power grid, infrastructure such as roads and nonprofits. The company has data centers across the country in states including Utah and has plans for an huge project in Louisiana.

In November’s elections, Democratic candidates in states including Virginia and New Jersey who promised to address electricity-price increases driven by data centers were victorious.

“There is a growing rebellion,” said Brad Carson, a former Democratic congressman representing Oklahoma who is now president of the think tank Americans for Responsible Innovation, which advocates for guardrails around tech development. “It’s cutting across every demographic and every partisan line that otherwise seems to divide the nation.” [...]