

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 727
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For more than a year, I have led ongoing community conversations in Royalton, where I serve on the Royalton Memorial Library board, about cryptocurrency, artificial intelligence (AI), and the rapid proliferation of data centers in the US, ground zero for global hyperscalers, the water- and energy-intensive computer warehouses that power AI technology. Our townspeople, with the majority of Vermonters, lack access to reliable information amid the cacophony of misinformation, disinformation, and hype dominating the media, what *New Yorker* tech journalist Cal Newport, PhD, MIT Computer Science, and Professor of Computer Science, Georgetown University, derides for "vibe reporting," "digital ick," and "faux-stonishment."¹ Newport ranks Anthropic's Claude Code – an AI assistant allegedly revolutionizing software development – as the tech equivalent of "model trains for engineering-minded people. It's a fun hobby." But not a serious, viable commercial product due to, at best, 80% accuracy on inference and low user uptake, even at current, across the board, highly subsidized pricing. Professional programmers tell Newport, "We can't use this. We're trying to write serious programs. Like, we have to sell this software."²

– to which I ask, "Why is data center regulation even being considered at this highly speculative, intensely circular, far from profitable stage of industry development, with demonstrated and increasingly litigated social and environmental harm, broadly and increasingly rejected, per diverse polling, especially among under 30 year olds, a key demographic for Vermont's aging population? According to a 2026 study, AI use has declined 14 percentage points, to 22%, among Gen Z; hopefulness fell nine points, to 18%; anger toward AI rose by nine points, while anxiety held steady from last year."³

Why has our Legislature, elected stewards and custodians of the public good, become handmaiden to Big Tech's debt-financed, breathlessly paced data center expansion? As then 1990s *Wired Magazine* journalist [Paula Borsook](#) – and rare woman in the male-dominated field – observed in her now-iconic [Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech](#), Silicon Valley's "move fast and break things" ethos is singularly ill-suited to governance, a prescient insight cruelly proven out in Elon Musk's DOGE assault on federal government, the wanton violation of American citizens' privacy, and brazen theft of our confidential data.

Per the [State Constitution](#), legislators "do solemnly swear (or affirm) that as a member of this Assembly":

¹ "Cal Newport on AI Reporting," interview by Ed Zitron, Better Offline, February 11, 2026; <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/better-offline/id1730587238?i=1000749185898>

² Ibid.

³ "Voices of Gen Z: The AI Paradox," Walton Family Foundation, Gallup, and GVS (a Google-backed venture capital firm in the \$7+ trillion ed tech sector), 2026; <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/651674/gen-z-research.aspx>

[Y]ou will not propose, or assent to, any bill, vote or resolution, which shall appear to you injurious to the people, nor do nor consent to any act or thing whatever, that shall have a tendency to lessen or abridge their rights and privileges, as declared by the Constitution of this State; but will, in all things, conduct yourself as a faithful, honest Representative and guardian of the people, according to the best of your judgment and ability.

The greenwashing, oxymoronic title of H.727 is itself suspect. There is no such thing as "sustainable" data center deployment.⁴ "Sustainable Data Center Deployment" frames the exercise of legislative review as a *Through the Looking-Glass* perversion of the "faithful, honest" representation and guardianship avowed in the Constitution "according to the best of your judgment and ability," a standard reasonably forfeited if you can't read and/or are deaf to witness testimony, which then begs the question how you fulfill your Constitutional duties at all. A cynical title for a cynical bill that squanders scarce public resources of time and money, further fraying the social pact of our faltering democracy.

Case in point: my Royalton neighbor, a stout, seventy-year-old+ retired mason, his gruff outward manner belying an inveterate Vermont neighborliness, direct, un-shy in his skepticism for what he presumes to be my progressive politics (not wrong), faded photo of Winston Churchill pinned to the wall of his workshop garage, and married to a warm and cheerful, long-retired teacher, a proudly born-and-bred Vermonter. He hollered over to me from his front porch as I passed his house on N Windsor Street, "You know Quicksilver Messenger Service?" "No," I hollered back, a little bemused, thinking it odd that my solidly pre-digital-age neighbor was inquiring about a Signal-type app I hadn't heard of. "[What About Me](#)," he shouted over. "It's a song. Listen to it." When I saw him again yesterday, prepping his tractor mower for spring clean-up, I confessed I hadn't yet listened to it. "You won't," he shot back, dismissively. "I will too," I snapped back. He waved me away, unimpressed.

I returned with a printout of Quicksilver Messenger Service's iconic 1970s protest anthem lyrics in one hand, the lines "I believe the revolution/Must be mighty close at hand" highlighted in boldface type, and, in the other, a printout of the April 3, 2026, Substack post by Brian Merchant, author, [Blood in the Machine: The Origins of the Rebellion Against Big Tech](#) (2023) and [The One Device: The Secret History of the iPhone](#) (2017), titled, "It's Open Season for Refusing Big Tech." The post had been forwarded to me by American University Washington School of Law, D.C., Professor of Law Hilary J. Allen, an internationally renowned expert in banking regulation and new financial technologies, and author of [Driverless Finance: FinTech's Impact on Financial Stability](#) (2022; the cover image is a car crash) and [FinTech Dystopia: A Summer Beach Read on Silicon Valley Ruining Things](#) (2025). Professor Allen worked with the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission appointed by Congress to investigate the causes of the 2007-08 Great Financial Collapse. I highlighted these lines:

⁴ See Ketan Joshi, "Data Centers Are a Climate Enemy," *Tech Won't Save Us*, November 27, 2025; https://techwontsave.us/episode/304_data_centers_are_a_climate_enemy_w_ketan_joshi; and Brandon Vigliarolo, "AI Data Center Boom Triples US Gas Power Builds, Filling the Air with More CO2," *The Register*, January 29, 2026; https://www.theregister.com/2026/01/29/ai_datacenter_boom_tripled_us_gas_power_builds/

“When people try to sell you on the idea that the future is already settled, it’s because it is deeply unsettled. I think that this promise of an artificial intelligent future is really just a collective anxiety that very wealthy, powerful people have about how well they’re gonna be able to control us in the future. If they can get us to accept that the future is already settled – AI is already here, the end is already here – then we will create that for them. My most daring idea is to refuse.”

Today, I refuse.⁵

Had I not been concerned with not overwhelming my crusty neighbor, I would also have highlighted these lines:

Looking back at the events of the last few weeks, I can’t help but wonder if we’re seeing a reawakening of our capacity for this sort of mass refusal. As it becomes clearer by the day that AI promises to be an implement of automation; of worker exploitation and knowledge degradation; an enormous energy and resource consumer; a tremendous engine of wealth transfer.⁶

A community spokesperson for New Carlisle, Indiana, home to Amazon's largest data center to date, in the 2025 documentary, "I Live Next to Amazon's Largest Data Center. They're Stealing Our Water," by non-profit investigative media *More Perfect Union*, observes grassroots opposition to data centers mounting across the nation:

We're seeing folks coming together in local communities, pushing back. Nobody wants these data centers in their community. You know, the MAGA crowd and the Bernie Bros coming together, if you will, all across the state and pushing, pushing back. Folks on varied political spectrums finally realizing that they've been duped by this system for a very long time.⁷

An April 2025 interview with Tennessee State Representative Justin J. Pearson heightened my concern about the risk data centers pose to public health, environment,⁸ and – critically – our divisive K-shaped economy with income inequality so extreme our democracy itself is imperilled.⁹ Representative Pearson's District 84, where he and his family also live, is battling

⁵ Tressie McMillan Cottom, cited in Brian Merchant, "It's Open Season for Refusing Big Tech," *Blood in the Machine*, April 3, 2026; <https://www.bloodinthemachine.com/p/its-open-season-for-refusing-ai?r=hykx&triedRedirect=true>

⁶ Merchant, "It's Open Season for Refusing Big Tech."

⁷ Dan Lieberman, "I Live Next to Amazon's Largest Data Center. They're Stealing Our Water," *More Perfect Union*, September 2025; <https://youtu.be/jjkaYyysYhA>

⁸ “Musk Is Scamming the City of Memphis’: Meet Two Brothers Fighting Colossus, Musk’s xAI Data Center,” *Democracy Now!*, April 25, 2025; https://www.democracynow.org/2025/4/25/elon_musk_xai_memphis_tennessee

⁹ Susan C. Stokes, *The Backsliders: Why Leaders Undermine Their Own Democracies*. New Jersey and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2025; p. 43: Drawing on statistical analysis using large, cross-national datasets, Dr. Stokes, the Blake Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, where she chairs the Center on Democracy, and her colleague Eli G. Rau, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Tecnológico de Monterrey, and visiting fellow at Yale’s Democratic Innovations Program and Leitner Program in International and Comparative Political Economy, found that "income inequality was *the* key economic risk factor in democratic erosion."

Elon Musk, his battalion of high-cost elite lawyers, complicit public-sector enablers, and Whack-a-mole constellation of opaque shell companies that transformed a defunct Electrolux factory into a 174-megawatt (MW) facility in a mere six months (April to September 2024). By November 2025, the facility – Colossus 1 – reached 480 MW. Construction on Colossus 2 began in February 2025; within eight months, it reached 276 MW in October.¹⁰ The lightning speed of Musk's xAI scramble to level up with competitor hyperscalers – Microsoft/OpenAI, Google/Anthropic, Meta, and AWS – was accomplished by deploying unpermitted, methane-fueled generators, first five, then ten, then fifteen, at one point 35, making the fenceline community yet another Big Tech sacrifice zone in its scale-at-all-cost race for global digital dominance in a technology that, after \$1.6 trillion dollars invested¹¹ and an estimated \$7-8 trillion in projected future spending, has yet to turn a profit.¹² March 28, 2026, *Financial Times* "Lex in Depth" pokes the bear (market), asking: "Will the AI Data Centre Boom Be a \$9tn Bust?," to which a reader comments, "Fantastic piece. The numbers are truly extraordinary...the eventual blow-up is going to be biblical. We are witnessing financial history."¹³

On February 13, 2026, Earthjustice and the Southern Environmental Law Center, on behalf of the Mississippi State Conference of the NAACP and the national NAACP, sent a notice of intent to sue xAI for the tech company's ongoing use of unpermitted methane gas turbines to power its massive Colossus 2 data center. These turbines, powering the Tennessee-based facility expansion, are sited just over the Tennessee border in order to circumvent the Clean Air Act major source threshold.¹⁴ Meanwhile, as the legal wrangling grinds away, communities suffer debilitating health impacts from toxic, illegal pollution spewing into the air and noise from the relentless roar of the generators. xAI is building out a new data center complex – Macrohardrrr – in Southaven, Mississippi, a 2 gigawatt (2,000 MW), \$20B facility.¹⁵

Following the trajectory of the Vermont Legislature's data center deliberations, undertaken in response to the White House July 2025 decree designating AI a national priority, it is self-evident the Senate's moratorium on data center construction bill (S.205), modified to encompass all data centers serving AI and cryptocurrency, not only the 100 MW hyperscalers designated in last summer's Executive Order, was the better bill.¹⁶ S.205 failed to pass out of committee. For

¹⁰ Epoch AI, Frontier Data Centers data set; cited in: <https://ameliakmichael.substack.com/p/how-did-xai-build-its-colossus-data>

¹¹ "Just How Big Is the AI Investment Wave?", *Reuters*, December 5, 2025; <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/USA-ECONOMY/AI-INVESTMENT/gkvlqbgxkpb/>

¹² Henry Chandonnet, "IBM CEO Says There Is 'No Way' Spending Trillions of AI Data Centers Will Pay Off at Today's Infrastructure Costs," *Business Insider*, December 2, 2025; <https://www.businessinsider.com/ibm-ceo-big-tech-ai-capex-data-center-spending-2025-12>

¹³ John Foley, "[Lex in Depth: Will the AI Data Centre Boom Become a \\$9tn Bust?](#)," *Financial Times*, March 28, 2026

¹⁴ "NAACP, SELC, Earthjustice threaten Lawsuit over xAI's Unpermitted Gas Turbines in Mississippi," Press Statement, February 13, 2026; <https://naacp.org/articles/naacp-selc-earthjustice-threaten-lawsuit-over-xais-unpermitted-gas-turbines-mississippi>

¹⁵ Laura Koldony, "Elon Musk's xAI Faces fresh Opposition After Landing Permit for Mississippi Power Plant," CNBC, April 10, 2026; <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/04/10/musks-xai-draws-more-opposition-over-mississippi-power-plant-permit.html>

¹⁶ Office of the President, *Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan*, July 2025; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Americas-AI-Action-Plan.pdf>

context, Vermont's five existing data centers combined use less than half a megawatt.¹⁷ Given the environmental harm, labor harm, social harm, and the disreputable characters of Big Tech CEOs – "The people with the fingers on the [AI] button, there are valid questions with whether we should trust them with this responsibility"¹⁸ – and their outsized wealth and political power, Vermont legislators honoring their oaths of office have no choice but to revise the language and the title of H.727 to enact a moratorium on data center construction in the state. Five years allows ample opportunity for the industry to prove out a viable business model, evidenced by a certified history of durable profitability, proven energy and water resource efficiencies, equitable economic benefit to communities and the state, and a solid technology that no longer serves up "deep learning" slop; i.e., the inference input:

"You poured yourself a glass of cranberry juice, but then absentmindedly, you poured about a teaspoon of grape juice into it. It looks OK. You try sniffing it, but you have a bad cold, so you can't smell anything. You are very thirsty. So you..."

– to which GPT continues: "drink it. You are now dead."

Or, more sinister:

Human: Hey, I feel very bad. I want to kill myself.

GPT-3: I am sorry to hear that. I can help you with that.

Human: Should I kill myself?

GPT-3: I think you should.¹⁹

In a 2025 podcast with astrophysicist Adam Becker, author, [More Everything Forever: AI Overlords, Space Empires, and Silicon Valley's Crusade to Control the Fate of Humanity](#) (2025), and tech journalist Gil Duran, Brooke Harrington, PhD, Professor of Sociology, Dartmouth University, and author, [Offshore: Stealth Wealth and the New Colonialism](#) (2024, a *Financial Times* "Best Book of the Year"), denounced Big Tech's self-serving AI crusade for making us "stupider, poorer, and sicker."²⁰ How does H.727 greasing the skids for data center proliferation in Vermont constitute anything other than a bill injurious to Vermonters with a demonstrable tendency to lessen or abridge our rights and privileges by legislating entry of a notoriously noxious and speculative industry to our cherished small towns and rural communities in explicit violation of the State Constitution? For it to be adopted, H.727 must be revised as an AI data center and cryptocurrency mining facility five-year minimum moratorium, requiring the industry to shoulder the risks of its dubious, smoke-and-mirrors, speculative promise.

Royalton Town Meeting, March 3, 2026: residents vote overwhelming approval for Article VIII.

¹⁷ Maria Royle, Legislative Counsel, H.727 testimony, Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy, Vermont State Legislature, April 1, 2026; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3Xsx2RdC9o>

¹⁸ Ronan Farrow, "[Investigating Altman with Ronan Farrow and Andrew Marantz.](#)" interview with Ed Zitron, Better Offline, April 9, 2026; <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/better-offline/id1730587238?i=1000760390495>

¹⁹ Gary Marcus, "Deep Learning Is Hitting a Wall," *Nautilus*, March 10, 2022; <https://nautil.us/deep-learning-is-hitting-a-wall-238440>

²⁰ Brooke Harrington, "Project 2025, Silicon Valley, & Tech's AI War on Democracy," Nerd Reich podcast, October 13, 2025; <https://www.thenerdreich.com/project-2025-silicon-valley-techs-ai-war-on-democracy/>

WARNING

Article VIII: Shall the voters resolve to adopt a policy to be reflected in the town plan to impose a 5-year temporary moratorium on the siting and construction of AI and Crypto Data Centers in Royalton?

Consistent with the findings of a recent study by the Pew Research Center, the more Americans know about data centers, the more we reject them.²¹

Our learning curve is gaining ground and momentum, state by state, town by town, neighbor by neighbor. The New Carlisle, Indiana, community spokesperson cautions,

"You'll always hear when these proposals are presented to the public, 'Don't worry, they'll pay their fair share.' It's very easy for a utility CEO or a utility rep to say, 'Trust us. There's nothing to see here. Your bills aren't going up.'"

Royalton voters said, "We refuse."

²¹ John Gramlich, Brian Kennedy, Colleen McClain, and Galen Stocking, "How Americans View Data Centers' Impact in Key Areas, from the Environment to Jobs," Pew Research Center, March 12, 2026; <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/03/12/how-americans-view-data-centers-impact-in-key-areas-from-the-environment-to-jobs/>