OUR FIGHT AGAINST AI DATA CENTERS IN NC

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NCEJN CO-DIRECTOR

AI systems: an extractive industry

"AI is a technology of extraction: from the minerals drawn from the earth, to the labor pulled from low-wage information workers, to the data taken from every action and expression. …

The creation of contemporary AI systems depends on exploiting energy and mineral resources from the planet, cheap labor and data at scale."

- Kate Crawford, Atlas of AI

Energy Use by AI Data Centers – globally

"In 2025, global data centers were estimated to consume 448 TWh of electricity (TWh = terawatt-hour)- trillion watts). **If data centers' electricity use were considered a country, it would have ranked 11th globally by electricity consumption.**

Projected global data centers' electricity consumption could exceed 945 TWh by 2030, accounting for almost 3% of projected global electricity use. **If treated as a country, 945 TWh would rank 6th globally by electricity consumption."**

Source: United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health. (2026). AI's environmental costs threaten water, land and climate. UNU-INWEH.

Energy demand by data centers expected to more than double in five years!

Energy Use by AI Data Centers – in the US

In 2024: 4% of total U.S. electricity use.

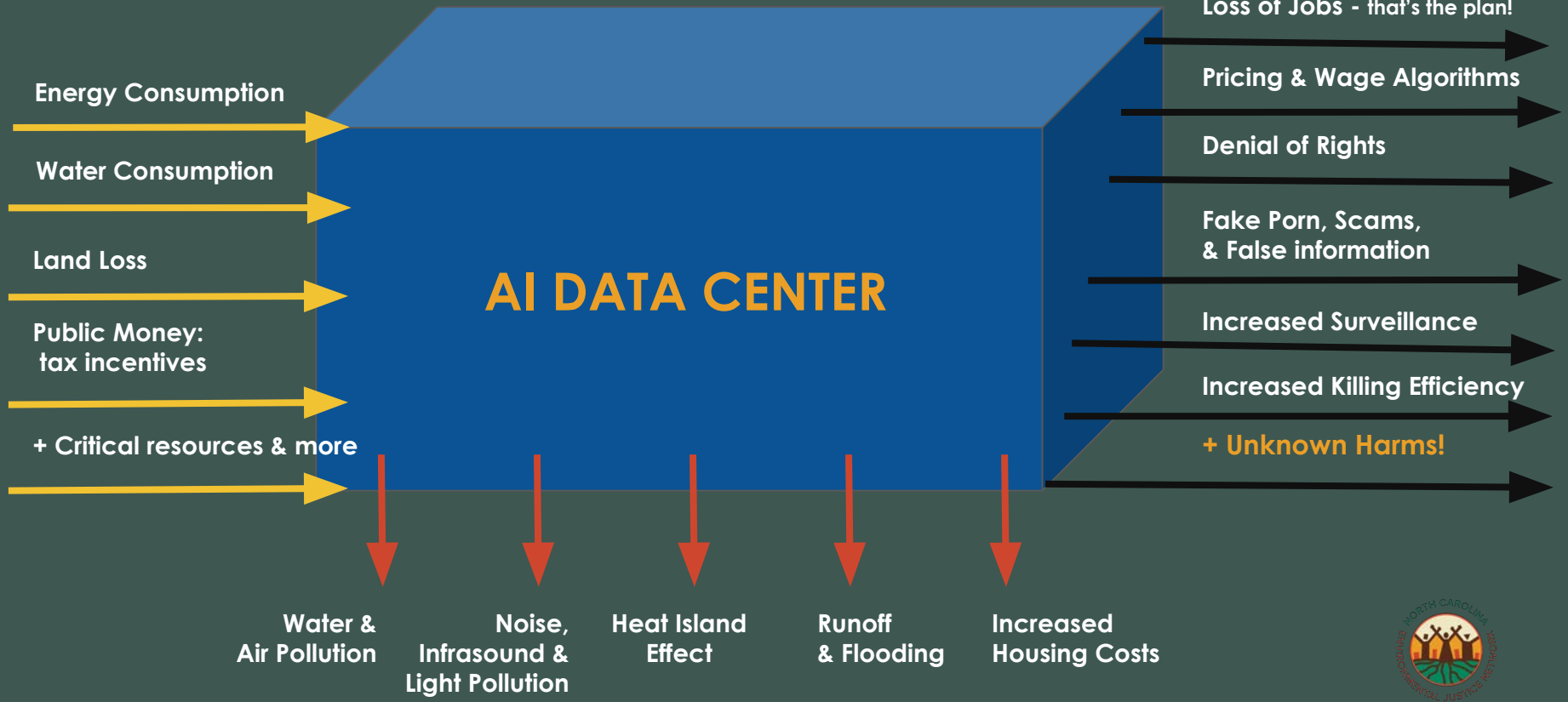
By 2030: 12% of U.S. electricity use

– More than the amount of electricity needed to power 26 million households!

Energy demand by data centers in the US expected to triple by five years!

Who pays for it all?
And in what ways?

AI Data Centers: An Extractive Industry



Why a statewide strategy?

- Connect organizers together

- Built a statewide network
  - Announce it
  - Welcome with an intro
  - Lead it
  - Communicate daily
  - Meet regularly in meetings (2x month)

- That's still not a strategy!
- That's just a (critical) space to talk.

- So…

North Carolina ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK

AGENDA

NC DATA CENTER STRATEGY CONVENING
Thursday, March 5 - Friday, March 6, 2026
New Hope Missionary Baptist Church,
306 S. English St, Greensboro, NC 27401

Together we will build a strategy that will work for NC.
We will knit our fights together under this common goal,
+ determine clear steps for action towards success.

DAY ONE : LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

11:30 AM	**Registration**
12:00 PM	**Lunch**
12:30 PM	**Introductions + Ice-breaker** **Please grab your lunch + have a seat**
1:15 PM	**Framing The Convening**
1:30 PM	**Landscape Briefing** **What We Know About Data Centers + AI** - Rania Masri, NCEJN **Scan of State + National Fights** - Sophie Loeb, Center for Progressive Reform
2:30 PM	**In-Depth Landscape Examination** In groups, we will **'Name The Moment'** + conduct a **'SWOT'** analysis Gallery Walk + Report Back
4:00 PM	**Break**
4:30 PM	**Role Playing** How to negotiate effectively in real-world data center siting + permitting contexts Let's build skill in reading institutional constraints, responding to deflection, + making grounded, strategic asks under pressure **Break into 10 groups of 5**
6:00 PM	**Dinner Out** + continue conversations!

Much Gratitude For Sponsorship SELC Southern Environmental Law Center + Guidance Center for Progressive Reform AINOW Rooted Futures Lab

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DAY TWO : ALIGNMENT + CONVERGENCE + COMMITMENTS

9:00 AM	**Arrival + Coffee**
9:30 AM	**Introductions + Re-Grounding**
10:15 AM	**The Policy Tools We Have** Review of **AI NOW Toolkit** + other resources
10:45 AM	**Our Desired Outcomes + Vision** Discuss in Groups + Report Back *Examples*: - A ban on data centers + cryptomining - Elimination or reform of data center tax exemptions - Utilities Commission rule on cost allocation - Guardrails on AI + Data Centers - Moratorium on new facilities - state-wide +/or counties - Political unity - building a political power-base - Other
11:15 AM	**The Necessary Conditions to Build Our Vision** Discuss in Groups + Report Back *Groups*: - Legal, regulatory, procedural leverage, + conditions - Political + electoral power - Public opinion, narrative, + legitimacy - Building alliances + creating fractures - Internal capacity, research, + strategic readiness
12:00 PM	**Lunch**
1:00 PM	**Statewide Goal + Power Mapping**
2:15 PM	**Break**
2:45 PM	**6-Month Action Plan + Organizational Commitments**
3:30 PM	**Closing - The Link In The Chain**

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Decisions taken → 3 Goals (majority vote)

Policy Power: State-Wide Ban on crypto mining and hyperscale data centers

People Power : Build a unified, statewide movement (Anti-ICE, Anti-AI, Anti–Data Center) and shift public narrative.

Electoral Power: New leadership by 2028

POLICY POWER Goal: Win concrete restrictions and bans on data centers and crypto mining at local and state levels.

March–April 2026 (Research & Targeting)

- Build list of elected officials and priority counties (by April 30)
- Secure co-sponsor(s) for draft statewide ban bill (by April 30)
- Draft candidate pledges and commitments (by April 15)

By August 2026 (Evidence Base)

- Produce statewide "need statement" backed by universities and researchers

By November 2026 (Local + Legislative Momentum)

- Introduce bill in state legislature (Helene bill downzoning removal fix)
- Secure 3+ state legislators (including bipartisan support) for statewide ban
- Pass 15+ county-level bans or moratoria
    - Starting targets: Durham, Edgecombe, Person, Apex

Spring/Summer 2027 (Statewide Policy Push)

- Organize lobby day with draft bill
- Build support for statewide ban/moratorium on:
    - Crypto mining
    - Hyperscale data centers

ELECTORAL POWER Goal: Build toward new leadership aligned with the movement by 2028.

2026 (Pre-Electoral Groundwork)

- Draft and circulate candidate pledges
- Begin identifying and engaging aligned candidates

2026 (Public Engagement & Base Building)

- Host 6–10 town halls or public forums across 10 counties
- Focus on dangers of data centers, AI, and extractive infrastructure
- Use forums to educate voters, build base, and identify aligned candidates

2027 (Alignment & Support)

- Deepen relationships with aligned candidates
- Prepare campaign infrastructure and training systems

2028 (Execution)

- Support and train candidates for midterm elections
- Mobilize movement base to elect new aligned leadership

PEOPLE POWER **Goal: Build a unified, statewide movement (Anti-ICE, Anti-AI, Anti–Data Center) and shift public narrative.**

March–April 2026 (Foundation)

- Finalize talking points & messaging (by end of March)
- Complete organizing guide (by May)
- Build relationships with communities in areas with existing moratoria (by April)
- Begin movement alignment across Anti-ICE, Anti-AI, and Anti–Data Center efforts

April–July 2026 (Coalition Building)

- Identify cross-sector champions (labor, farmers, artists, faith communities) (by July)
- Develop statewide narrative: “people over profit”
- Begin outreach to major organizations and community leaders

August–November 2026 (Movement Consolidation)

- Produce and distribute:
  - Shared talking points (3 core messages)
  - Public-facing guide
  - Supporting media (e.g., film)
- Secure at least one major organization per sector publicly supporting a ban (by November)

CAPACITY BUILDING (Cross-Cutting Infrastructure) Goal: Resource and sustain all three pillars.

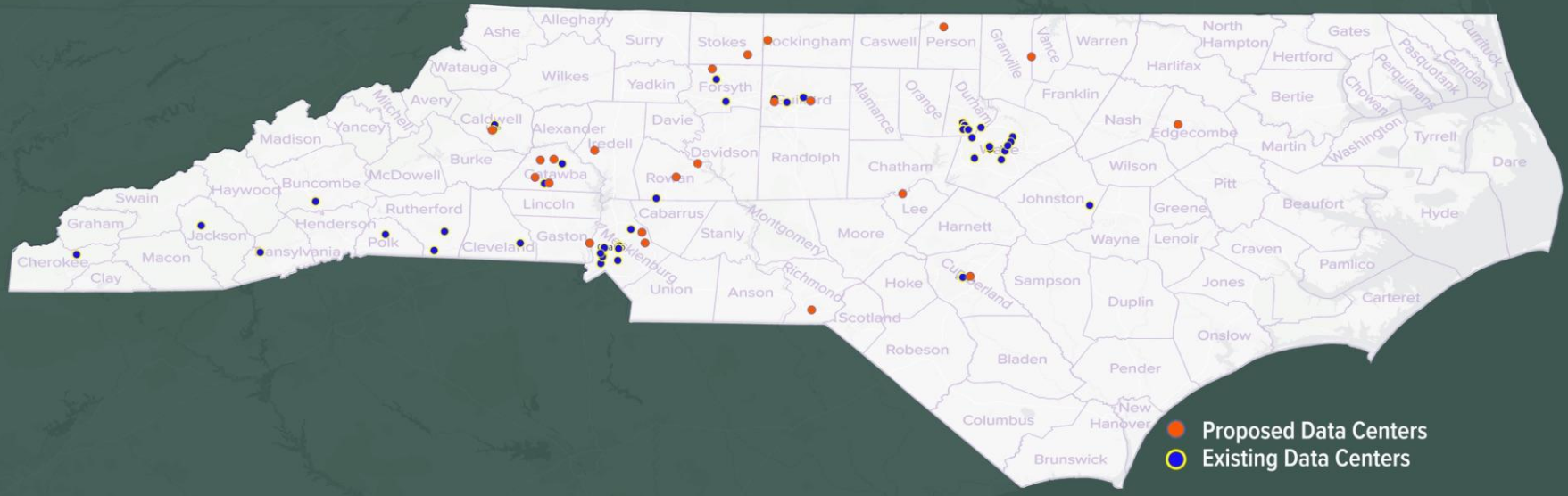
By August 2026

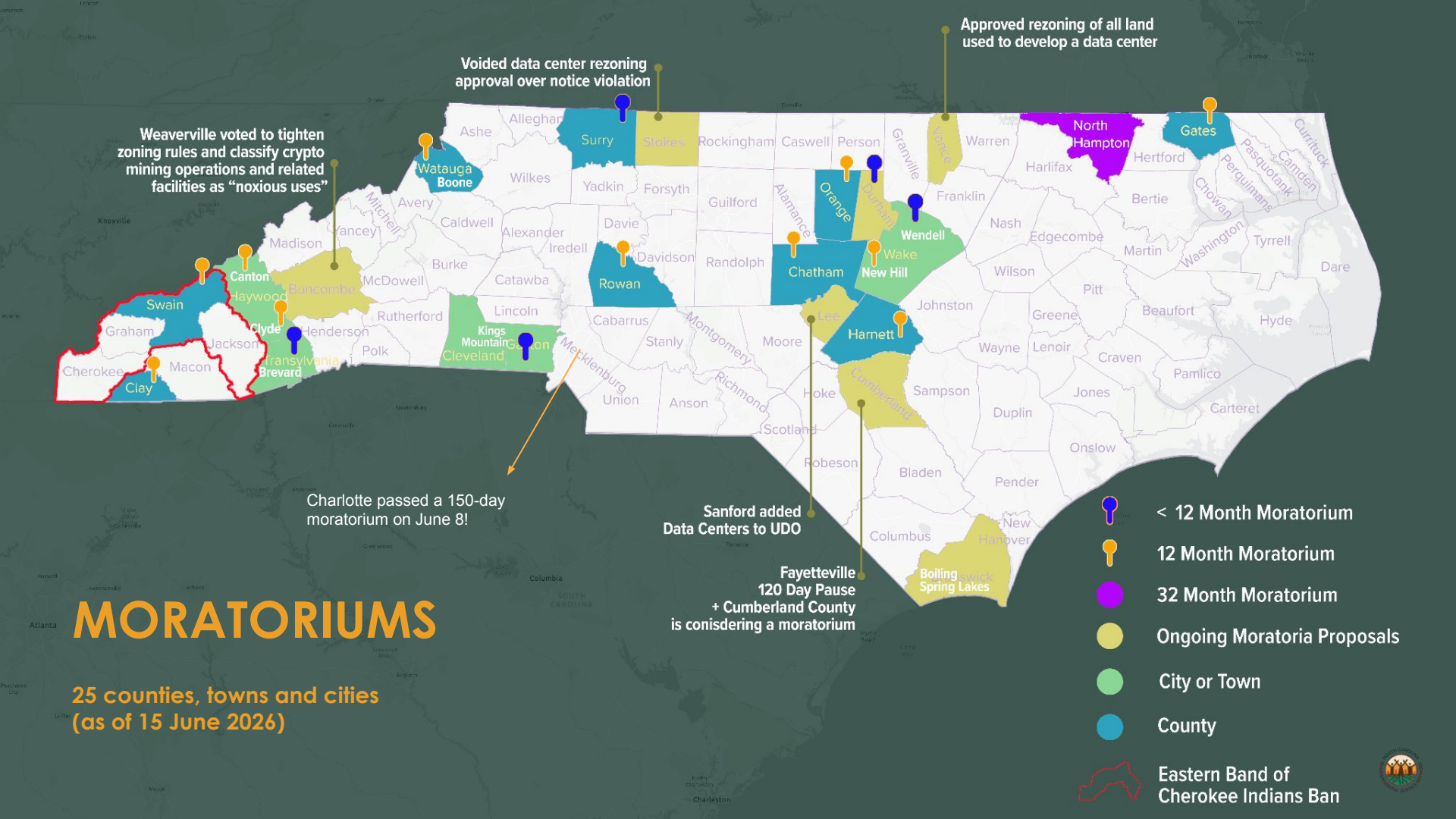
- Build research capacity with universities and experts

By January 2027

- Secure $5 million in funding
- Build infrastructure, including 501(c)(4) for lobbying power

EXISTING & PROPOSED NC AI DATA CENTERS




Approved rezoning of all land used to develop a data center
Voided data center rezoning approval over notice violation
Weaverville voted to tighten zoning rules and classify crypto mining operations and related facilities as “noxious uses”
Charlotte passed a 150-day moratorium on June 8!
Sanford added Data Centers to UDO
Fayetteville 120 Day Pause + Cumberland County is conisdering a moratorium
MORATORIUMS
25 counties, towns and cities (as of 15 June 2026)
< 12 Month Moratorium
12 Month Moratorium
32 Month Moratorium
Ongoing Moratoria Proposals
City or Town
County
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Ban

PROPOSED NC DATA CENTERS

Size of planned, proposed, & under construction: at least 6,659 acres!

- Size of 8 NYC Central Parks // Larger than William B Umstead State Park
- Size of the Research Triangle Park

Energy capacity of these data centers: at least* 3,388 MW

- 1 MW (1,000 kW) can power 600 - 1,000 homes.
  - Average MW of data centers proposed is 212 MW
  - Total MW of proposed data centers - could power 2 - 3.4 million homes!
- 1 out of 3 of the projects in NC have not publicly disclosed energy capacity

Organizational Challenges …

- One more day for the in person strategy convening ..
- Keeping up with the commitments made
  - **Planning is easier than implementation**

- Network → Coalition / vs Alliance
- Greens vs Communities
- Pragmatic vs Revolutionary

Tactics

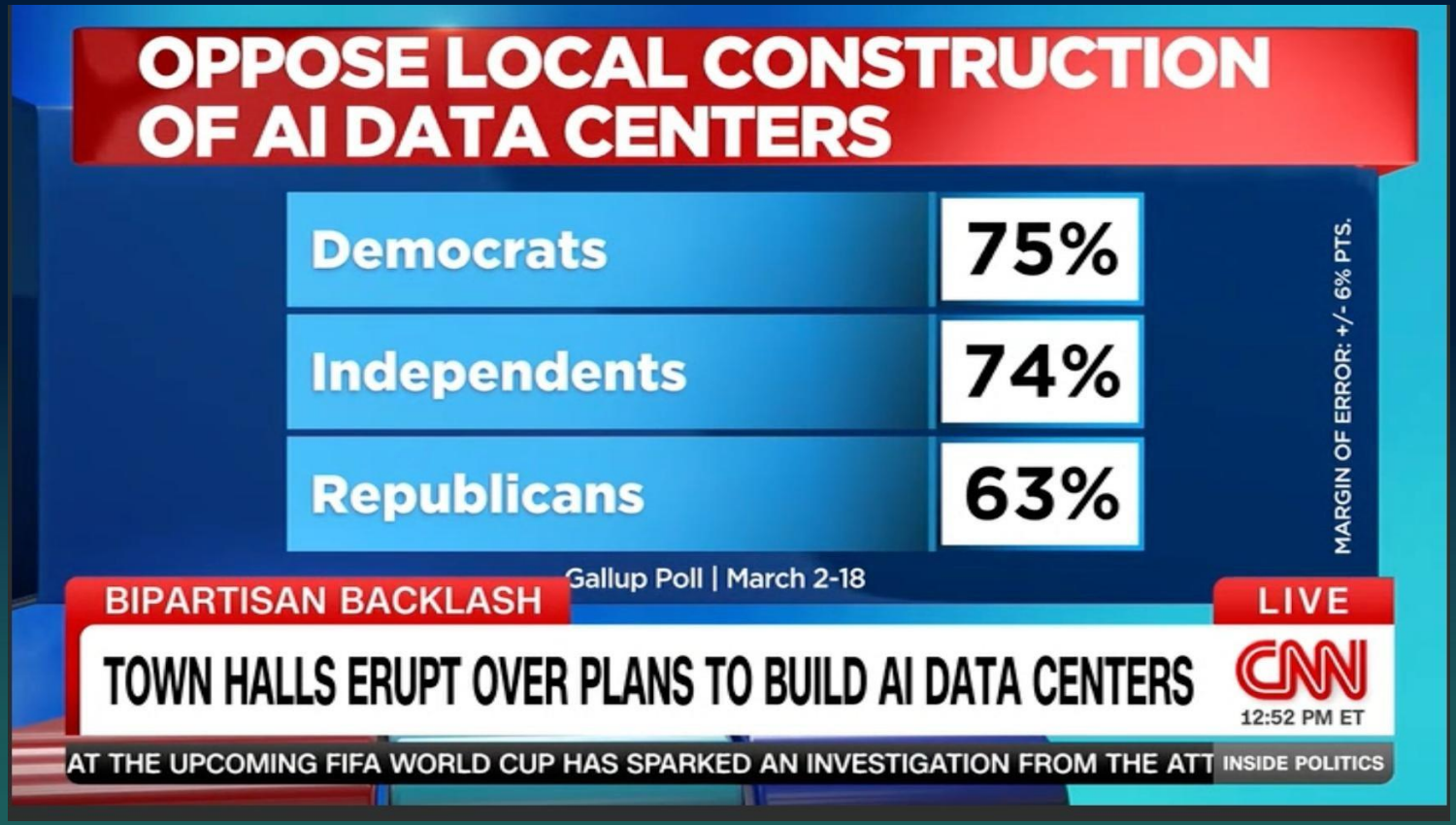
- Continue to connect organizers together
- Verify the information (when possible)
- Organize Defense & Offense

Reject the Inevitability Narrative!

- Raise the alarm
  - Media & Signage
  - Town hall meetings w/ livestream
  - Protests
- Win an election
- Flood the City Councils & County Commissioners Meetings
- Build on previous relationships
  - Private meetings
  - Community Meetings
- Be ready to litigate

“70% of Americans oppose AI Data Centers in their area”

Source - March Gallup Survey, published on May 13, 2026



Source - CNN, May 28, 2026

"Despite their large footprint, no legally binding federal energy standards are currently in place to oversee private-sector data center construction and management."

Source: Congressional Research Service, May 12, 2026

WHY MORATORIUMS?

Moratoriums

+

Removal of tax incentives *(investments in harm)*

12 - 32 months

Enforceable regulations to protect communities

+

Investments in care

WHY 32 MONTHS?

Month 1-6	Study the potential impacts (energy, water, noise, pollution, rate hikes, land use) of data centers, cryptocurrency mining and other data processing facilities, in consultation with local utility providers, residents, and subject matter experts, preferably grounded in a justice framework.
Month 6-12	Draft specific land use ordinance amendments and performance standards to regulate these facilities
Month 12-18	Hold public workshops and meetings to gather public input, review the draft amendments, and revise them if necessary based on public input
Month 18-24	The City Council / County Commissioners / NCGA to examine data and provide a recommendation for regulation
Month 24-32	The City Council / County Commissioners / NCGA to hold the necessary public hearings to consider and potentially adopt the final ordinance amendments

Public input and expert advice would be sought during each part of the process

POLICY TOOLS

LOCAL	STATE	BOTH
Conditional use permits & rejections (Need to attach binding conditions)	Limits to corporate influence	Prohibitions, restrictions, moratoriums
Zoning ordinances and municipal code amendments	Environmental protections	Repeal & limit tax incentives
Noise mitigation		Transparency measures (inc. post approval) & ban NDAs
Community health protections (air pollution)		Energy & Water Regulations
Need to establish strong <u>enforcement</u> mechanisms		Labor protections
(Source: North Star Data Center Policy Toolkit)		AI use regulation

STRONG EXAMPLE OF CONDITIONAL USE PERMITTING

The city of Chandler, Arizona stipulates that "data centers are not permitted to operate unless explicitly approved."
(Ordinance No 5033, passed in December 2022)

STRONG EXAMPLE OF WATER REGULATION

Aurora, Colorado stipulates that high-water-use industries projecting consumptive water demands above certain thresholds cannot be developed unless water sustainability measures are taken.

SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR WATER PROTECTION

No data center shall be approved unless the applicant demonstrates, through independently verified hydrologic analysis, that the facility will not impair existing or reasonably anticipated residential, agricultural, ecological, municipal, or industrial water uses, including water resources necessary to support planned future growth, under normal, drought, or projected climate conditions.

GREENWASHING SCAMS

1. Powering data centers with renewables isn’t a solution
2. Wastewater recycling won’t save our water
3. “Closed-loop Cooling” is a marketing gimmick
4. “Bring your own power” won’t keep electricity affordable
5. The Carbon Capture Scam is an empty promise
6. “Biogas” intertwines data centers with polluting factory farms
7. Generative AI will not help us fight climate change

Source: https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/2026/04/10/data-center-greenwashing/

"AI systems … are **designed to discriminate, to amplify hierarchies, and to encode narrow classifications**. …

They are expressions of power that emerge from wider economic and political forces, created to increase profits and centralize control for those who wield them."

- Kate Crawford, Atlas of AI

TACTICS

- Impact the Elections
  - Candidate Questionnaire
  - Plan your run
- Divest your funds (retirement money, pension, etc) from AI …
- File public records requests
- Document everything

- Join an organization & Network
- Purge Palantir - https://purgepalantir.com/

- Raise the alarm
  - Media & Signage
  - Town hall meetings w/ livestream
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- Win an election
- Flood the City Councils & County Commissioners Meetings
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- Be ready to litigate

THE ESSENCE…

- Embody a Justice Framework
- Intersectional Organizing
  - Labor
  - Immigrant Rights
  - Anti-War & Anti-Genocide
  - Liberation movements

Reject the Inevitability Narrative!

Revolutionary Optimism

Let’s Build a Political Tsunami of Transformational Change!

CRITICAL RESOURCES

Sign Up for
the NCEJN Newsletter

- North Star Data Center Policy Toolkit: https://datacenters.ainowinstitute.org/
- Food and Water Watch:
  - Don't be fooled: 7 Data Center Greenwashing Lies https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/2026/04/10/data-center-greenwashing/
- Maps & More
  - Data Center Impact Dashboard
  - Is AI Profitable Yet?
  - NC Data Center Activity
- NC Data Center Network
  - rania@ncejn.org

Founded in 1998, the **North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN)** is a grassroots, people of color-led coalition that builds power with systematically marginalized communities to resist climate, environmental, racial, and social injustice.

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