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Community and industry leaders, as well as workers at the DOE Paducah Site, attended the announcement Wednesday of a \$100 billion project that will bring an AI data center and dedicated energy infrastructure to the site.



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John W. Ketchum, CEO of NextEra Energy, speaks Wednesday at the AI data center campus in Paducah.

\$100 billion AI energy hub announced for DOE Paducah Site

BY BEN OVERBY AND
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PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

The U.S. Department of Energy announced a \$100 billion private investment at the DOE Paducah Site for an AI data center campus with a designated energy infrastructure Wednesday.

The Paducah American Energy Hub — a partnership with Brookfield, NextEra Energy, Big Rivers Electric Power Corporation, Jackson Purchase Energy Cooperative and Paducah Power System — is one of the largest in the history of Kentucky and is expected to create roughly 8,000 construction jobs and 600 permanent jobs.

Brookfield — a global alternative asset management and investment company that manages more than \$1 trillion in capital — has leased 785 acres from the DOE Paducah to build, finance and operate the AI data center.

NextEra Energy Resources will be responsible for building and supplying the energy infrastructure. Big Rivers Electric Corporation will provide wholesale electric service to the site with Jackson Purchase Energy Cooperative delivering retail service and Paducah Power System serving as a community supporter.

Commercial operation dates for the data center and battery energy storage system components of the project are expected as early as 2028, while the natural gas generation component is expected as early as 2032.

During an announcement event at the site, CEOs from the companies involved in the Paducah American Energy Hub project, as well as DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management Tim Walsh, U.S. Rep. Andy Barr and U.S. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright discussed its potential impact on Paducah and the United States and addressed common concerns about AI data centers.

The project is consistent with the Trump administration's Ratepayer Protection Pledge, which requires the project's energy generation and storage capacity to exceed the amount needed to power the AI data center. According to a

release from the DOE, the AI data center campus will require 1.8 gigawatts of energy, while NextEra Energy plans to develop 2 GW of new grid-connected natural gas-fired generation and deploy up to 2.6 GW of battery energy storage.

"We're building energy infrastructure specifically designed for this data center campus," John W. Ketchum, CEO of NextEra Energy, said. "Those costs will be borne by the project itself, not by anyone else here in western Kentucky. We often describe this as a 'bring your own generation' approach, and we believe it represents a responsible path forward for meeting America's growth and their needs. It's a model that supports economic development while protecting existing customers. It's a model that brings new generation resources onto the grid while enhancing reliability, and it's a model that ensures that communities see the benefits of growth without having to shoulder the cost."

In his remarks, Barr said excess energy flowing back into the regional power grid will help reduce energy costs for Kentucky families and businesses long-term. He also touted that the project will put the DOE Paducah Site in a position to help the United States in a global race for AI advancement.

"During the Cold War, [the site] helped power America's national security at one of the most consequential moments in our history," Barr said. "Now it begins a new mission."

Following the event, Bruce Wilcox, president of Greater Paducah Economic Development, addressed concerns about the AI data center's water use, explaining that it will use a water system that recirculates after a 2 million-gallon initial fill and does not require constant water consumption for cooling. Additional water use will be required for the power generation aspect of the project.

"The technology that they are using will be a closed-loop technology system which recirculates the water, probably a couple million gallons a year," Wilcox said. "Depending upon how you look at the natural gas combined cycle plant, it should be less than

5 million gallons a year. That might seem like a lot to a lot of folks, but when you take into consideration that approximately 162 billion gallons flow by the Ohio River every day, 59 trillion gallons a year, it's not even a rounding error."

McCracken County Judge-Executive Craig Clymer said the project will bring significant tax revenue during the buildout and ongoing through property tax and payroll tax.

"It's going to bring massive wealth into our county and community, so we're really excited about that," he said.

Clymer said as the project develops, the county will need to take steps to accommodate housing and traffic demand, and they have been talking with developers.

"We're looking at developing anything from small camping trailers on up to large homes and everything in between," Clymer said. "We're going to need several thousand housing units, and we're getting that done. I also chair the Paducah-McCracken County Industrial Development Authority, and we're looking at building more roads, how to move people about, lessening congestion, and that sort of thing."

Paducah Mayor George Bray said the city is talking with developers daily to try to accommodate housing needs for projects at the DOE Paducah Site and called for more collaboration between the city and county on those efforts.

Bray also said he understands community members' concerns about an AI data center being built in McCracken County, but feels it is an important step forward for the region and honors the original purpose of the DOE Paducah Site.

"I understand people's wariness and concern, but we have researched this," Bray said. "We understand what's going to happen here. We believe that this is the next step in U.S. energy dominance. We have a responsibility to redevelop this site. There's U.S. patriots out there who worked at the Gaseous Diffusion Plant for so many years and gave themselves, and now it's up to us to honor them and redevelop the site."



DYLAN LOVAN/Associated Press

Auctioneer Jonathan Klunk shows a black tie worn by KFC founder Col. Harland Sanders that was part of the memorabilia sale Tuesday in Shelbyville.

Auction of Col. Sanders' personal items brings in nearly \$300,000

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His personal Mirromatic pressure cooker brought in \$11,500 while a bow tie and suspenders sold for \$8,000.

The official commission certificate naming Harland Sanders a Kentucky Colonel issued in 1955 went for \$23,000 as a collection of memorabilia belonging to the internationally renown Kentucky icon sold at auction Tuesday.

Col. Sanders, who died Dec. 16, 1980, at age 90, still lives in television commercials and his image appears on buckets and boxes of chicken sold globally in 31,981 restaurants by KFC. After a new interstate bypassed his roadside diner, he began the company as Kentucky Fried Chicken in Corbin with a unique pressure cooking system and tasty recipe famously featuring 11 herbs and spices.

The historic auction in Shelbyville of Colonel Harland Sanders' personal collection generated just shy of \$300,000 in sales,

according to The Menish Group, which coordinated the sale.

It featured more than 100 artifacts sold across 74 lots and attracted collectors, historians, entrepreneurs, and fans around the world. The auction reportedly attracted more than 500 bidders, both in person and online.

The collection had been preserved since 1974 by the Settle family, which purchased Blackwood Hall and the Claudia Sanders Dinner House directly from Colonel and Claudia Sanders.

The top-selling item was Col. Sanders' Personal Handwritten Datebook and Working Planner, which sold for \$30,000. The planner served as Sanders' personal working notebook in 1964, documenting observations, expenses, travel details, meals, business notes and other aspects of his daily activities. One handwritten page in the planner reportedly lists 11 ingredients and their associated measurements, which historically

remains a trade secret.

Other top-selling items of Sanders included a U.S. Patent Office Publication "Process of Producing Fried Chicken Under Pressure," \$10,000; his gold Masonic Ring, \$8,000; a pair of framed letters signed by President Richard Nixon, \$5,000; and Sanders' personal carving knife set, \$4,510.

"The response exceeded our expectations," Bill Menish, lead auctioneer for the sale, said in a news release. "Collectors, historians, franchise operators and Colonel Sanders enthusiasts recognized that this wasn't simply a memorabilia auction — it was an opportunity to acquire artifacts that remained together through an extraordinary chain of ownership."

While the memorabilia has been sold, sealed bids are being accepted through midnight Friday for the purchase of the historic Claudia Sanders Restaurant, Blackwood Hall and associated business assets.

Beshear says he wasn't briefed about data center for Paducah

BY PIPER HANSEN
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Kentucky's governor was not briefed on a \$100 billion private investment being made in the western part of his state for a data center and energy campus to support it, his spokesperson said Thursday, a day after the project was announced with fanfare in Paducah.

A spokesperson for Gov. Andy Beshear said he "hasn't been briefed by any of the companies or agencies involved" and therefore had questions about the project's power, environmental impact, jobs, "and whether the project will pay the community its fair share of taxes."

The U.S. Department of Energy unveiled plans Wednesday for the massive investment to transform part of its former uranium enrichment site in McCracken County into one of the nation's largest artificial intelligence data center campuses, marking one of the biggest economic development projects in Kentucky history.

Energy Secretary Chris Wright, nominated by President Donald Trump, was in Kentucky for the occasion. U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, who does not represent that part of the state in Congress, also were there plus a handful of Republican state lawmakers.

Beshear, who often is ribbed by Republicans for his frequent appearances at ribbon cuttings and ceremonial check presentations, was notably absent. Just last week, he was on scene for the capital city's first Target opening.

At the event, organizers said the governor was invited. According to an energy department

spokesperson, it "provided notifications last week and this week to members of the Governor's office. This is standard practice." The governor's office did not respond to a question about being invited.

Neither the governor's office nor his economic development cabinet put out news releases about the investment, which is typical for both when jobs are announced whether they're supported by private or public dollars. On Wednesday, Beshear and the cabinet shared a Northern Kentucky manufacturing business would add another facility that would create 73 jobs.

Dubbed the Paducah American Energy Hub, the investment will support a 1.8-gigawatt hyperscale data center for artificial intelligence and a new, 2-gigawatt energy campus to supply it, including natural gas-fired power plants. Its construction will create 8,000 temporary jobs and its operations will create 600 permanent ones.

Brookfield Asset Management will build and operate the data center while NextEra Energy Resources will build and supply the power required to serve the site.

Brookfield and NextEra did not immediately respond to requests for a response to the governor's comments, more information about his invitation and confirmation as to whether they communicated with Beshear's office about the investment.

Big Rivers Electric Corp. will provide wholesale electric service to the site and Jackson Purchase Energy Cooperative will deliver retail service. Other support will be provided by

Paducah Power System.

Additional power generated at the hub not consumed by users of data center space will be put back onto the grid. A tenant for the data center has yet to be announced.

The data center part of the hub will be on 600 acres at the site of the former Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant and leased by NextEra from the department for multiple decades, officials said Wednesday. The natural gas power generation component will take up 200 acres and battery energy storage is on 300 acres.

The announcement positions Western Kentucky at the center of the nation's race to build the computing infrastructure needed for AI, while highlighting the growing role of former industrial and federal sites in meeting soaring demand for data centers.

The hub is just one of several projects at the former uranium enrichment plant announced in the past year that have been sparked in part by the Trump administration's push to get data centers, and nuclear energy, on American soil.

Roughly a year ago, state officials said General Matter would invest \$1.5 billion in a new uranium enrichment facility at the site to produce fuel for commercial and next-generation nuclear reactors, while another company, Global Laser Enrichment, has proposed its own advanced enrichment project.

Beshear was part of the announcement celebration event in August 2025 after General Matter signed its lease for 100 acres at the site.