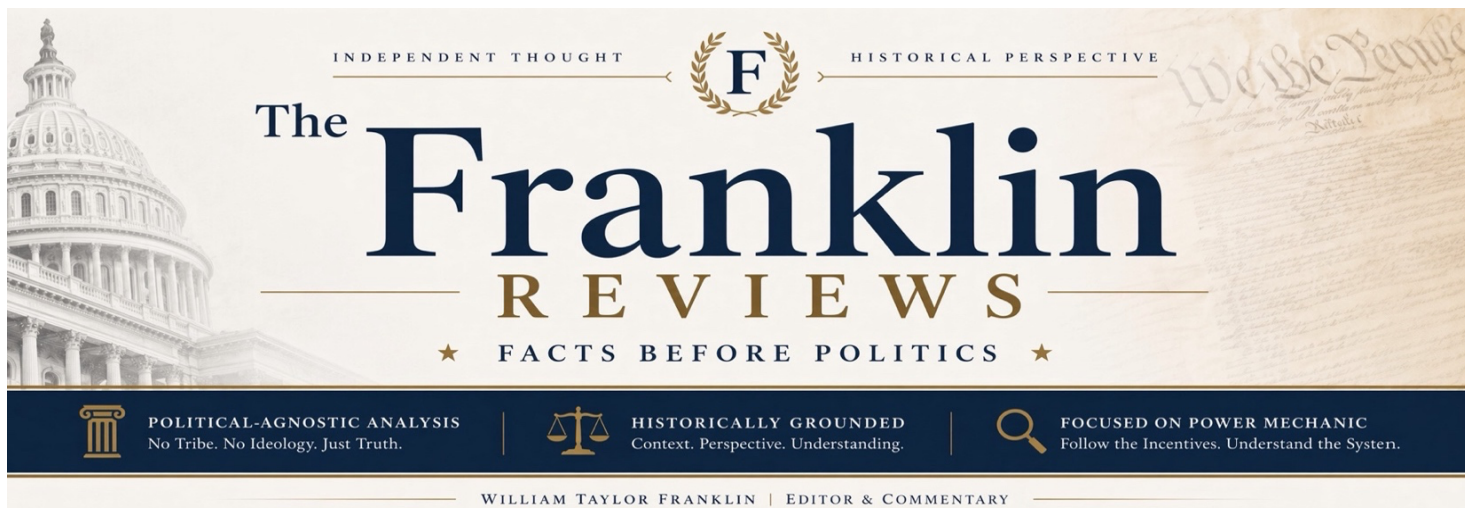




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The Rooms Are Old. The Race Is New.

By William Taylor Franklin

Data Centers. Not a new invention. A new arms race.

If America wants an honest conversation about data centers, there is a simple place to begin: they are not new.

Data centers are almost as old as the microchip. Email, use a bank card at the grocery store, order from Amazon, a teenager in Papua New Guinea opening Facebook — none of that happened in “the cloud” by magic. It happened in locked buildings full of computers, most of them built years before 2026. What changed is not the invention of the room. What changed is the scale, and an arms race that moved into the cornfield.

By the end of 2025 the world already had some 11,000 to 12,000 data centers on the public lists. America had the most. The giant companies that run the internet already operated more than 1,300 of the very large ones. None of that appeared on New Year’s Day 2026. The old buildings were big enough for the internet people already used. The new ones train and run artificial-intelligence systems. They are writing their own language and they are doing that in the blink of an eye. They can read and summarize the Encyclopedia Britannica faster than I typed this sentence.

Let’s talk about Scale

North of Milwaukee, in Port Washington, Vantage (a company that builds and runs large data centers) is building Lighthouse (the name of that Port Washington campus) for OpenAI and Oracle: hundreds of acres, four buildings, about 2.5 million square feet, and enough electricity for a mid-sized city — roughly 900 million watts for the computers alone. Ground broke in December 2025. Opening is planned for 2028. The concrete has been poured and the steel is going up.

South of Milwaukee, in Mount Pleasant, Microsoft already turned on the first hall of a similar project in 2026. That one is live.

A current iPhone can do about 35 trillion tiny AI-style calculations per second. The Microsoft hall already running is in the same neighborhood as about 25 million of those phones, all working at once. There is even a word for this much computing power. It is called zettascale — a machine in the neighborhood of a sextillion calculations a second.

A sextillion is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 — a 1 with 21 zeros. In the American system that is 10 raised to the 21.

.Ways to picture it:

- A thousand is 1,000.
- A million is a thousand thousands.
- A billion is a thousand millions.
- A trillion is a thousand billions.
- Keep climbing: quadrillion, quintillion, then sextillion.

The 500 fastest scientific supercomputers on Earth in 2016 (that feels like yesterday), added together, equaled only about 19,000 of today's iPhones. Broader estimates of all the world's computers around the end of 2015 put the planet in a range of roughly 6 million to 40 million. One operating hall in Racine County Wisconsin sits in the middle of that range. Both exceed the total computing power of the universe just 10 years ago.

In plain terms: a single data center south of Milwaukee is now doing the work of something like the whole world's computers in 2016. The kinds of math are not identical. The size check is enough. One building now rivals a planet of machines from ten years ago. And, there are an additional 800 similar data centers being permitted, approved and/or built right now.

New halls still need a power plant's worth of electricity. The Port Washington campus, at about 900 million watts, would use in one year roughly thirteen times the electricity the city of Sheboygan uses. Someone has to build the plants and the wires, and someone has to pay for them. Some of the new plants have designs to create their own power. Clean nuclear power.

Many new AI halls reuse the same cooling water in a closed loop. Port Washington's plans call for almost no water burned off on site. The part that still matters is off the property. The plant that makes the electricity often uses water to stay cool. A building can be "no water" at the fence and still be a water story two counties away.

Finally, A Bipartisan Fight and Agreement

This fight has not sorted cleanly by party.

People pushing the campuses want capacity before a rival gets it, construction jobs, tax base, and a claim that America should own this industry instead of China. The White House treated Stargate as a national program.



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People fighting them do not want their electric bill to subsidize a private cluster. On the left, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have backed a national pause. On the right, Josh Hawley, Thomas Massie, and Marjorie Taylor Greene have attacked the same projects as corporations capturing the grid. In Wisconsin, a Marquette poll found about 70 percent saying the costs outweigh the benefits, with almost no party gap.

Two governors have imposed statewide pauses that run at least through the November midterms. Democrat Kathy Hochul of New York signed the nation's first statewide moratorium in July: a one-year freeze on environmental permits for halls of 50 megawatts or more. Republican Greg Abbott of Texas ordered the grid operators in August to stop new data-center hookups until every project in the queue is audited. No end date. One is a permit freeze. The other is a power-line freeze. Both last past Election Day.

Democrat Janet Mills of Maine vetoed an 18-month freeze to protect one mill project. Republican Phil Scott of Vermont vetoed a siting-and-ratepayer bill. Hundreds of towns in both red and blue states have short local pauses. Those are not gubernatorial moratoriums.

The split is less Democrat versus Republican than people who live near the fence versus people who live on the contract.

This week Fox News reported that national progressive and environmental groups are funding fights against new halls, with money from American foundations and, in the grant databases, foreign climate donors. A harder-left layer has taken money tied to Neville Roy Singham, an American living in Shanghai. Treat that as a ledger, not a sermon. Fox Business has already corrected an on-air claim that specific Utah opponents were funded by China. There was no evidence.

The other ledger is larger. A group tied to Marc Andreessen and OpenAI's president said this week it had \$50 million to defend the buildout, including in Wisconsin. An industry super PAC had already spent more than \$28 million this cycle. Anyone who stops at Soros or Shanghai is not following the money. Anyone who says every angry neighbor is a foreign agent is not following the neighbors.

A Fox poll found 70 percent of voters opposed a data center in their own area. Half named power, water, noise, and the environment. That complaint would exist if the national checks bounced.

Washington and the companies talk as if the buildings just appeared. Neighbors talk as if the internet they already use does not require a building. Both stories skip the arithmetic.

A hall equal to tens of millions of iPhones is not a closet of office servers and it is not a cartoon villain. It is a factory.

Factories have always needed land, power, rules, and neighbors willing to live with the trade.

These aren't ideological propositions. They are supply, demand, and a receipt.

The country can build these campuses. It is already building them. The adult question is narrower: who pays for the power, who tells the truth about water, who writes the political checks, and whether a town that never asked to host an arms race gets to set terms.



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The buildings are not a mystery. They are an old invention, rebuilt for a new race — and an accumulated bill for choices America is making in public.



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