

Issue: Florida, Renewable Energy, Utilities

Florida - Renewable Energy Talking Points

No Solar in the Sunshine State!

Florida's renewable energy production and consumption is dismal in comparison to its potential, especially in solar expansion. This is due to the impact of strong and wealthy utility companies and the Republican lawmakers in their pockets.

Heavy Reliance on Natural Gas Dwarfs Renewables- Over 70% of Florida's power comes from natural gas—the highest percentage in the nation—with no end in sight to this reliance. While the solar market is slowly growing, *it only accounts for 0.38% of Florida's power*. There are several investor-owned utilities in Florida, but Florida Power & Light (FPL) serves about half of Florida's residents and is the 3rd largest utility in the nation.

The “Sunshine State” lags behind in Solar- Florida ranks 3rd in the nation for rooftop solar potential but only 12th for cumulative solar capacity actually installed—a drop from 9th place since 2016. Florida lags behind, lacking many policies that have driven solar investment in other states such as Renewable Portfolio Standards.

Voters Take Matters into their Own Hands- Amendment #1 was a very high-profile state constitutional amendment on the 2016 ballot. It was backed and excessively funded by the big utility companies, but was ultimately rejected by the voters when it was revealed to be no more than a deceptively-worded scam to limit solar expansion in Florida. A different (pro-solar) constitutional amendment (Amendment #4) was passed by voters the same year, allowing tax breaks for solar customers. Despite the best efforts of the utilities, the voters of Florida are choosing to march ahead toward solar expansion.

Public Service Commission Serves the Utilities- Florida's Public Service Commission (PSC), the purported watchdog of the power companies, appears to be in the pocket of the utilities. It has a history of controversial rate hikes, deregulation moves and cuts to conservation goals, and has *never rejected a utility request* for a new natural gas plant. The major utilities have donated over \$165,000 to legislators, overwhelmingly Republican, who choose Commission members. The utilities let it be known that a good job in the industry could await if commissioners do their bidding, and jobs have been lost by those acting against the utilities.

Utilities' Large Donations and Influence- The major utility companies in Florida contributed \$12 million to the campaigns of FL state lawmakers from 2010-2015, \$10 million of which went to Republicans. Over the past few years, several bills threatening a negative impact on the environment have been proposed by Republican lawmakers who were recent beneficiaries of the utilities, and some were actually written by utility lobbyists.

The “Florida Favor” from Trump – a Gift to Republican Gov. Rick Scott- Florida enjoyed a surprise exemption from the Trump administration to the recent decision to drill off the US coastline, and many see the move as a tactic to woo Republican Governor Scott to run for US Senate. Scott himself only recently settled on an anti-drilling stance when drilling became politically unpopular in Florida. Florida doesn't need a game of political chess played with its beautiful and valuable coastline.

An Anti-Trade Policy that Kills Jobs and Disproportionately Harms Florida- The 2018 solar tariff will negatively impact the US solar industry, particularly solar installations which account for over 50% of solar-related jobs. The new tariff is estimated to reduce solar installations in the US by 11% over the next 4 years, making the solar industry an early casualty in Trump-era trade wars. States with fledgling solar markets are disproportionately affected by the tariffs. Texas, Florida and South Carolina will suffer the most, unlike states with strong renewable portfolio standards. It appears that Florida's lagging solar policies hurt both its environment and its economy.

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