

# Your Corruption Dollars In Action, Working For Florida (Public Service Commission, That Is)

August 22, 2017



[Miami New Times](#) has the following article, further revelations about the sham group called Florida's Public Service Commission (PSC.)

*Sham: A thing that is not what it is purported to be. 'our*

*current free health service is a sham' Origin: Late 17th century: perhaps a northern English dialect variant of the noun shame. Oxford Dictionaries*

Of shame this board has none.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

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# Power Companies Pumped \$166,400 to Florida Lawmakers Who Control Their Watchdog Group

[Miami New Times](#) has the following article, further revelations about the sham group called Public Service Commission.

[Jerry Iannelli](#) | August 18, 2017 | 8:00am

The Florida's Public Service Commission (PSC) has exactly one job: act as a check on the state's powerful local electricity monopolies such as Florida Power & Light. The board has to sign off on rate increases and regulates safety and service issues – but critics have long said the regulators are barely a rubber stamp.

Now, as state lawmakers work to fill three vacancies on the PSC board, it's abundantly clear why the watchdog board has no teeth: Every single politician deciding who gets to sit on the board has taken thousands of dollars in campaign donations from

power and fossil-fuel companies.

According to the Energy and Policy Institute (EPI), a private utility watchdog, the 11 lawmakers who have had a hand in appointing the people sitting on the PSC have taken a combined \$166,400 from utility and oil-industry sources. [All but two of those lawmakers have taken more than \\$10,000 in donations from the power industry.](#)

“The more than \$165,000 that have been contributed by the power and fossil fuel companies to the officials throughout their careers highlighted in the chart does not even take into account the funds contributed by other companies regulated by the PSC, particularly the communication companies and water utilities,” the EPI wrote yesterday.

Florida’s utility firms, including FPL parent company NextEra Energy, criticize the EPI for not revealing its donors and point to a Campaign for Accountability report that [labeled the group a “PR vehicle for clean-tech companies.”](#) In a previous statement to New Times, the EPI said it disputes that report. The group instead said it’s funded by “environmental foundations interested in addressing the threat posed by climate change. We do not accept or receive funding from any corporations or trade associations.”

Regardless, the information in the EPI’s latest report comes directly from state campaign-finance records.

Florida’s PSC has long been criticized as a broken watchdog agency, a revolving door of energy-industry alumni, and a collection of foxes guarding the proverbial henhouse that is the multibillion-dollar private-power industry. The board is in charge of approving utilities’ requests to build new power plants and raise rates on consumers, and the PSC has been accused of being too lenient on companies such as FPL by rubber-

stamping rate hikes and plans for environmentally sketchy power plants. Last year, the PSC let FPL jack up rates by more than \$800 million because FPL claims it needs to build a backup natural-gas power plant – but that rate hike also ensured that FPL’s \$1.6 billion 2015 profit remained untouched.

In 2014, the PSC voted to let power companies [gut efficiency guidelines by 90 percent and to end solar-rebate programs by the next year](#). Also in 2014, the PSC let FPL charge customers for a random fracking venture in Oklahoma that wasn’t guaranteed to turn up oil or gas – the Florida Supreme Court [reversed that decision two years later](#). (In 2014, the watchdog group Integrity Florida put together a [comprehensive study on the PSC’s long-standing conflicts of interest](#).)

The tendrils of power-company campaign money show exactly how the PSC ends up crammed with utility-industry sycophants. PSC members are nominated by a [board of 12 people](#) – state Sens. Kelli Stargel, Bobby Powell Jr., and Kathleen Passidomo, as well as state Reps. Mike La Rosa, Janet Cruz, and Mike Miller – along with six unelected officials appointed by the state Senate president and speaker of the House. Those legislators have included past Senate Presidents Don Gaetz and Andy Gardiner, as well as current Senate President Joe Negron. Likewise, former House Speaker Will Weatherford and current Speaker Richard Corcoran have also appointed board members.

Those six unelected officials currently include the president of an accounting firm, a corporate lawyer, the owner of a propane-supply company, a former Verizon Wireless midlevel manager, a waste-management services manager, and one actual water-quality activist.

According to the EPI’s figures, Negron has accepted \$32,150 from the power and oil sectors in his career, while Corcoran has

received \$10,500. Of the elected officials listed, only Powell and Gaetz took less than \$10,000 apiece. (The EPI's list includes contributions from "oil and gas" sources, which include AGL Resources, Chevron, ExxonMobil, the Florida Natural Gas Association, and Koch Industries.)

To fill vacancies on the commission, the "Nominating Council" votes on the best candidates and sends those results to Gov. Rick Scott, who selects the appointees. The state Senate must then confirm them. According to the National Institute on Money in State Politics, [Scott has received \\$28,725 from the oil and gas industry and \\$19,750 from electric utilities.](#)

Of the three vacant seats, two members – Ronald Brisé and Art Graham – have reapplied for their old positions. Someone new will fill the third slot.

Yesterday the nominating committee sent its recommendations to Scott: Brisé and Graham [received the most votes from the committee](#) and will likely be reappointed, while Newberry Mayor Bill Conrad – who chairs the Florida Municipal Power Agency – was [awarded the top slot for the open position.](#)

The five others vying for Conrad's slot include a host of Scott administration alums and stalwart Republicans. [There isn't anyone close to an environmentalist among the bunch:](#)

- Erik L. Sayler, a lawyer in the state's Office of Public Counsel
- Theodore Schrader, a former Tampa Bay Water board member and CEO of the Winter Haven Citrus Growers Association
- Richard Glorioso, a former Republican state representative from Plant City
- Gary F. Clark, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's deputy secretary for land and recreation
- David Richard Workman, a former Republican state

representative from Melbourne

The nation's power companies account for roughly a third of all U.S. carbon emissions – a previous EPI report noted power companies operating in Florida have known about the impacts of climate change since at least 1968 but have done comparatively little to fight the affects of global warming. [In fact, their trade association, the Edison Electric Institute, has funded climate-change-denying PR campaigns while internally admitting human-caused climate change is real.](#)

To fight climate change, Florida needs a Public Service Commission free from power-company influence.

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