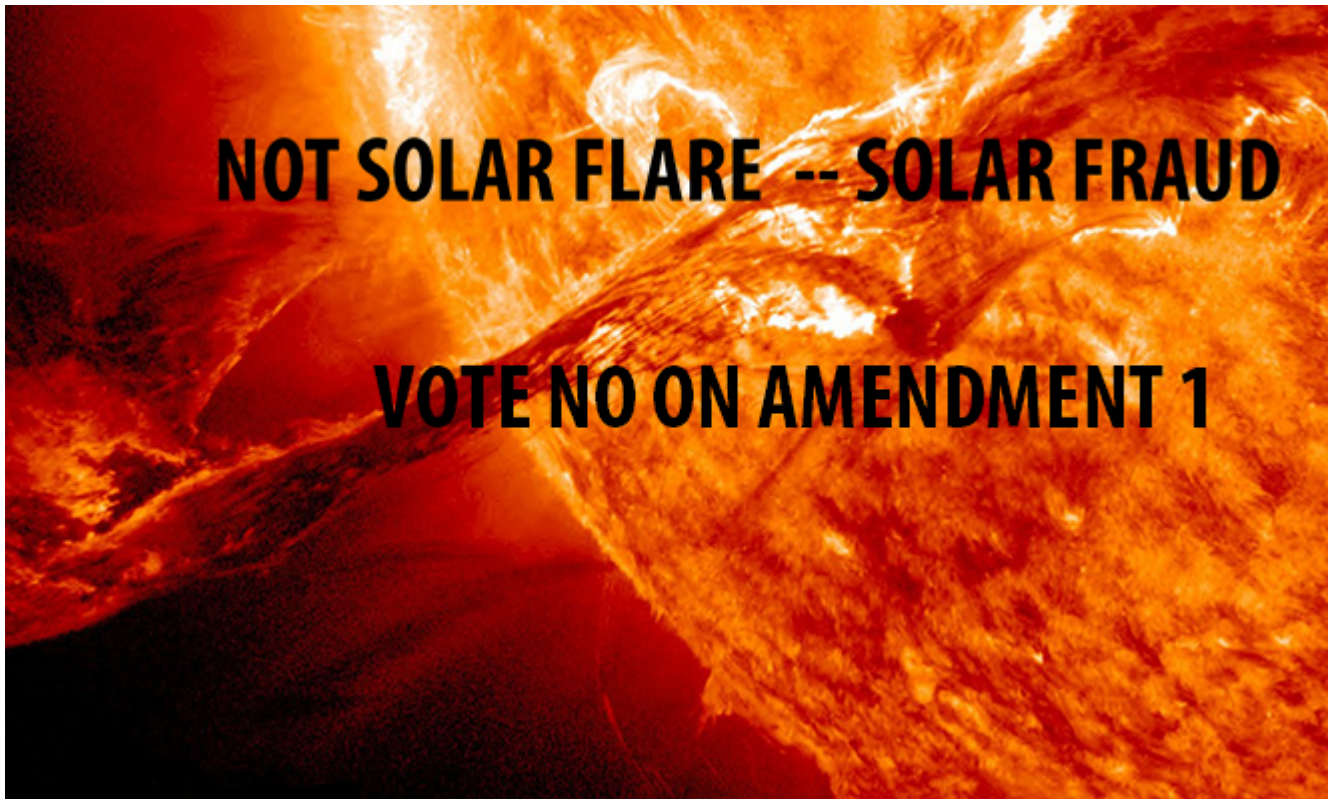


How Florida May Lose The Battle For Solar

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This article in [Forbes](#) is about the deception of Duke Energy, FPL, Koch, Exxon Mobil, TECO, NRECA and Gulf Power and others who want to keep the Florida consumer at their mercy. They have spent millions in this deception, hoping the consumer will not investigate and find out the truth.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

How Florida Residents May Lose The Battle For Attainable Solar Energy

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Applying the dark arts of satire, cynicism & humor to consumer tech.

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I live in the state of Florida. While often the butt of [jokes](#) and [political nightmares](#), it is also a state of nearly year-round sunshine. There is rarely a day that the sun isn't lighting up the beaches or burning into my retinas on the way to work. The best thing about the sun isn't just that it heats the Earth and [watches over Teletubbies](#), but it is a clean energy source. Now an amendment on the November ballot may threaten the future of solar power in Florida.

The present of solar power in Florida isn't a cheap or attainable one and that's where the confusion around [Amendment #1](#) is leaking in like sunlight before your alarm clock goes off in the morning. Solar panels [are not cheap to install and own](#). So the standard structure in many states is for customers to lease the panels through a third-party and sell excess electricity back to the utility grid.

Currently, Florida is one of five states that does not allow

this third-party activity. The passing of Amendment #1 would allow solar leasing (through the utility) making solar affordable for many consumers, though does not address third-party leasing. It would also give the current utility companies the right to compensate for their solar losses by adding new fees to solar consumers' [non-existent] bills. This catch-22 could lead to a quick death for the future of solar power.

The utility companies see solar power [as a threat](#) to their century old business model. Utility companies don't want consumers hopping off the grid and harnessing and storing their own energy. The big utilities would rather consumers stay dependent on a system that is still reliable but [slowly crumbling and in need of infrastructure improvements](#). So instead of figuring out a way to make solar affordable and available to all consumers, the [Florida Supreme Court voted 4-3](#) to allow the energy companies the chance to control the narrative. The amendment is sponsored by a group called "Consumers For Smart Solar".

So who is in this awesome sounding group looking to control solar power initiatives? All you have to do is follow the money. [Click on a radio box](#) on the Florida Department of State Division of Elections site, run the query and you'll find companies like Duke Energy, FPL, Koch, Exxon Mobil, TECO, NRECA and Gulf Power among some smaller organizations.

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The gist is that energy companies [account for 80% of the \\$21 million spent](#) on this amendment. Every single one of these companies is threatened by consumers harnessing the power of solar and even partially disconnecting from the grid on their own accord. In Florida, under current laws, if you have rooftop solar you are providing a utility and all utilities must be

providing power all hours of the day. This is how utility companies have been able to combat third-party solar.

Amendment #1 states:

This amendment establishes a right under Florida's constitution for consumers to own or lease solar equipment installed on their property to generate electricity for their own use. State and local governments shall retain their abilities to protect consumer rights and public health, safety and welfare, and to ensure that consumers who do not choose to install solar are not required to subsidize the costs of backup power and electric grid access to those who do.

To the general voter, that sounds great. Solar power is fantastic! The government wants to protect our rights! What does that last part mean? Who cares! Solar power!

First off, there are no new consumer protections. Florida residents [already have the right](#) to own and lease solar equipment (generating electricity from that solar equipment off the grid is another issue.) While not completely ambiguous, the second sentence is worded very specifically. Instead of flat out saying so, those who chose the solar route will be charged by the utility companies for the electricity they should be using.

That's right, if you are getting free energy from the sun, the local utility company will charge you anyway. So what would be the motivation to go full solar if the utility company is going to charge you anyway?

Therein lies the rub. If you vote yes on the amendment, you are praying to Ra, Helios, Ravi or the dozens of other sun gods that the utility companies don't burn out solar customers in fees that negate any savings from going full solar. If you vote no on the amendment, then you are praying to the same gods that the

Florida State Legislature figures out a better way to allow solar energy leasing and use without factoring in the needs of the utility companies. Solar works and it [can work in the Sunshine State.](#)

For about as long as I can stare at the sun I'll sympathize with the utility companies. Moving to renewable resources from fossil and nuclear isn't easy. The sun only shines half the day, the wind isn't always blowing and we won't turn off our air conditioning units and television sets in these cases. We'll still demand energy and the utility companies will have to meet it. To me though, that just means that utility companies need to not only find a way to create energy using renewable resources, but a way to store it as well. Plus, if I'm off the grid relying on my solar panels and energy storage, isn't it my problem if I'm without electricity? It would seem so.

Amendment #1 was labeled as a "wolf in sheep's clothing" by Florida Supreme Court Justice Barbara Pariente [in a letter of dissent.](#) She went on to say, "Masquerading as a pro-solar energy initiative, this proposed constitutional amendment, supported by some of Florida's major investor-owned electric utility companies, actually seeks to constitutionalize the status quo."

That's exactly what this amendment is. This is an attempt by utility companies to maintain the status quo; their stranglehold over antiquated and exhaustible fuel sources as our main source of energy while we collapse under the weight of global warming, staring up into the sky at the one thing that could save us.