

Get Ready to Fight for Solar

January 21, 2015



Bruce Ritchie

“A proposed amendment to the state Constitution would remove regulatory barriers to solar energy production.” Bruce Ritchie, free-lance journalist in Tallahassee has published an article “Solar plan could be in for a fight.” in the [Gainesville Sun](#), today, Jan. 21, 2015.

Environmental groups, among them Floridians for Solar Choice Inc. and Conservatives for Energy Freedom announced on Jan. 14 a plan to put an amendment to the Florida Constitution in 2016 to remove state regulation preventing solar energy development.

You can see the article here or go to this [link](#) to see the original piece in the *Gainesville Sun*. OSFR is pleased that Nathan Crabbe and the *Sun* has seen fit to grant us permission to reproduce in full their articles dealing with the environment.

Bruce Ritchie: Solar plan could be in for a fight

By Bruce Ritchie
Context Florida

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A proposed solar energy amendment probably won't be a walk in the park as Amendment 1 was last year.

On Jan. 14, a coalition of energy and conservative groups announced an effort to put an amendment to the Florida Constitution on the ballot in 2016 to remove regulatory barriers to solar energy production.

Supporters said that Amendment 1, the water and land conservation funding initiative approved by 75 percent of voters in November, shows that an environmental ballot initiative can pass in Florida if doesn't hurt business.

"Florida does vote both conservative free market and environmentally protected," said Tory Perfetti, chairman of the Floridians for Solar Choice Inc. and Florida director of Conservatives for Energy Freedom.

But other supporters predicted opposition from utilities and possibly their allies.

The proposal would remove barriers to encourage stores like Wal-Mart and Publix to buy energy from companies that would install and maintain solar panels on store rooftops.

Utilities nationwide are raising concerns that increased sales of energy from third-party providers leaves utilities and other customers to pay a larger share for maintaining the regional power system and energy grid.

Representatives of Florida Power & Light Co. and Duke Energy Florida declined to comment on the amendment.

"We are committed to energy policies where solar options are

fair and beneficial to all of our customers,” Duke Energy spokesman Sterling Ivey said.

But a spokesman for municipal utilities said the proposal raises concerns that utilities will have to maintain power generation at times when solar isn’t available, such as nighttime and cloudy days.

The Florida Retail Federation is backing the amendment because it offers retail companies a choice in choosing lower-cost electricity, said Randy Miller, the federation’s executive vice president for government affairs.

The question is whether industry groups will side with utilities in opposing the measure. They’ll probably wait until the measure clears review by the Florida Supreme Court and supporters collect the nearly 700,000 signatures needed to put it on the ballot.

Amendment 1, the water and land conservation funding initiative, didn’t face organized opposition leading up to the November election.

Florida Chamber of Commerce representatives spoke against putting funding measures in the Constitution, and some property rights groups raised concerns, but there were no TV commercials against Amendment 1.

The solar energy initiative likely would be different. And that’s why Stephen A. Smith, executive director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, says supporters will need to raise \$8 million to \$10 million to fight utilities to win in 2016.

By comparison, supporters of Amendment 1 spent \$6.1 million, with about half of that spent just to collect signatures and get the measure on the ballot. By comparison, supporters of the

medical marijuana amendment that lost in November spent nearly \$8 million.

Smith compares the expected fight with utilities over the solar amendment to the biblical David vs. Goliath.

“It will be a challenge,” Smith said. “And anyone who says that it is not going to be a challenge is naive.”

Bruce Ritchie is an independent journalist covering environment and growth management issues in Tallahassee. He also is editor of Floridaenvironments.com. Column courtesy of Context Florida.



Many supporters of alternate sustainable fuels see the irony that Florida, which enjoys abundant sunshine, lags so far behind other states in using solar energy. Indeed, Florida is one of only 5 states where laws place a barrier to the individual homeowner wanting to convert to solar.

Wondering about the top states in the U.S.? Surely they would be in the sunny South, no? No. NY, MA, CT and OR. So that concern about nighttime and cloudy days the utilities spokesman had, doesn't seem so valid, after all.

Cloudy Germany has managed to claim title to the planet's country which most utilizes solar power. Surprisingly, perhaps, China is number two and closing fast. The U.S. with its cutting edge technology drags in at number 5.