

Editorial: Solar Bill Bad for Economy and Environment

BY WILLIAM "COTY" KELLER

The Sunshine State ranks second from last (behind Alabama) in solar energy per capita. Florida Power and Light projects a mere 25 percent solar contribution by the end of the decade, with less than 2% generated by rooftop solar. That figure falls far short of the 70-100% required to reach zero emission by the end of this decade in order to reduce the current economic and humanitarian crises from rising global temperatures.

Global warming aside, solar is the most competitive (cheapest) way to make electricity, even when including the cost of battery storage. Florida's rooftop solar industry currently employs about 9,000 directly and over 40,000 including related businesses. Multiply that by ten or twenty-fold needed to max out rooftop solar and a rosy economic job picture emerges.

Net metering is the economic key to residential rooftop solar. Net metering allows excess solar energy to be exported back to the grid on a 1-to-1 basis. This means every 1 kilowatt hour (kWh) sent to the grid will be offset against 1 kWh used from the grid.

Net metering benefits both the utilities companies and customers. Rooftop solar customers make money by saving on electric bills and produce zero emission energy. The utilities make a profit by selling the cheap electricity provided by customers. Net metering is a win-win arrangement.

The proposed bill (Senate Bill 1024, House Bill 741) would change all this. Excess rooftop solar power would no longer offset power used from the grid. Instead, excess power generated would only be credited at "avoided cost" (about 3 cents/kWh) each month instead of being available in future months to offset the use of electricity coming from the grid

(priced about 12 cents/kWh). Utility companies would also add monthly fixed charges, access fees, or minimum bills as they see fit for solar customers.

If it becomes law, this bill will remove the primary financial incentive for homeowners to invest in rooftop solar. The industry will tank and those 9,000 jobs (plus related businesses) will be lost.

and state governments regulate utilities. Florida's most important role is in the generation of electricity from non-emitting sources of power. One law can make this happen: a law that requires utilities to generate 100% of their power by non-emitting energy sources (nuclear, solar including rooftop, and/or wind) by 2030. This is called a "low carbon electric portfolios standard," and is referred to as "the most powerful arrow in the governments quiver" by the Union of Concerned Scientists.

To assure incentives for rooftop solar, this law must give utilities credit towards the 100% goal for the rooftop solar of their net metering customers.

Take action now. Tell your senator and representative to:

1. Immediately reject SB 1024/ HB 741 because it was written by the utility industry and is sponsored by office holders who take donations from the utilities. It will cost thousands of jobs and make Florida's meager solar energy production even lower. The bill is not in the interest of the public.

2. Craft two laws that will have a positive impact:

- Virtual net metering.
- Low carbon electric portfolio standard.

These laws will save customers money on electric bills, create hundreds of thousands of jobs, and give all a chance to avoid the worst that rising temperatures bring.

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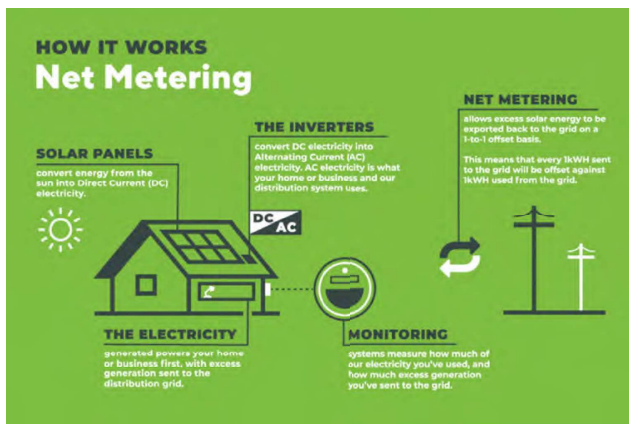


Photo courtesy of CIR Electrical Construction Corp.

The latest attempt to kill net metering in Florida must be squelched now. Instead, the Florida legislature should expand current law to include *Virtual Net Metering*, which allows utility customers to share the electricity output from a single solar power generator. Think of the millions of condo owners who would like to install a common solar system. There are also customers who otherwise are not now able to install solar panels on their homes, either because they're renters, they can't afford panels on their own or due to structural or shading issues. Virtual Net Metering would enable customers to access solar energy through a community effort.

Electricity is a BIG part of the climate solution,

Rolling Out the 'Unwelcome Mat' on Sarasota Beaches

BY DIANE DESEMBERG

Imagine a warm, sunny mid-February afternoon at your favorite Sarasota beach. Lying on a beach towel, you're surrounded by beach toys, watching your children frolic in the water. As the tide comes in, you move back, toward the drier portion of the beach. Your children join you. Suddenly — from the balcony behind you — "Yo! Can't you see the No Trespassing signs? Get off my property!" You look around, surprised. You have unwittingly waltzed into the extraordinarily complex battleground of competing property rights.

The right to kick someone off your property, although generally well-protected, is not absolute. For example, law enforcement with a legal warrant may not be denied entry. And in Florida, beach ownership does not necessarily mean an absolute right to tell others to leave. Many times, public beach use of private property is protected by the Customary Use Doctrine.

Now for a deeper dive into what just happened. You were likely lounging on land held for your benefit by the State. Florida's Public Trust doctrine protects public access along the shore seaward of the Mean High Water Line.

But, as soon as you moved landward of the Mean High Water Line, you may have entered private property. However, after publicly funded beach nourishment, private property that is seaward of the Erosion Control Line is no longer private. Regardless of where the invisible lines fall, you and your parents have been coming to this beach for decades. Certainly, you have some claim to put your towel here. This is the rationale behind the Customary Use doctrine. If the beach has been used recreationally by the public in a manner that is "ancient, reasonable, without interruption and free from dispute," your use of the dry sandy beach may not be interfered with by the owner, even if you are on private property.

Given the country's dependency on a tourist-based economy, ensuring public access to beaches should be a high priority. And yet, recently Sarasota County Commissioners unanimously passed Ordinance No. 2021-034, allowing



Rande Robbins was one of the residents disheartened to find private property flags/signs sprouting up all over Sarasota beaches.

beachfront property owners to post more signs. An incidental sign ordinance may not sound like a threat to public beach use. But, when these signs include familiar jingles such as 'Private Property' and 'No Trespassing', the threat is clear. The new ordinance allows property owners to erect up to four incidental signs on their beach property without a permit. Additionally, they may erect 8-foot-tall flags and one sign for every 500 feet along the border of the property.

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