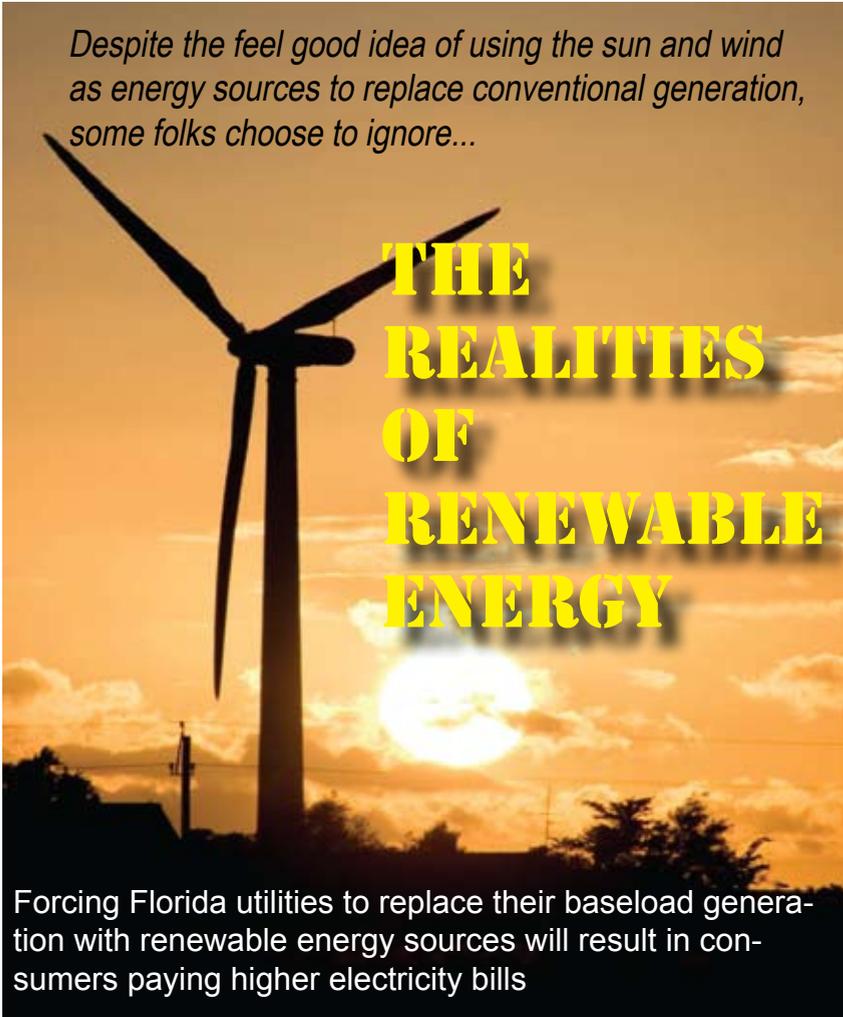


Despite the feel good idea of using the sun and wind as energy sources to replace conventional generation, some folks choose to ignore...



THE REALITIES OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

Forcing Florida utilities to replace their baseload generation with renewable energy sources will result in consumers paying higher electricity bills

By Wayne Mattox, Kilowatt editor

The idea that Florida can replace nearly a quarter of its conventional electricity generation with renewable energy sources has gotten a lot of favorable press. Last month, a North Florida newspaper editorialized that renewable energy sources like solar and biofuel resources offer great potential. They wrote that the Florida Legislature should require utilities to obtain 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. The editorial urged that a “renewable energy standard” be created for the state’s utilities to follow because 29 other states already have a renewable standard.

A renewable energy standard would require utilities to obtain

20 percent or more of their total generation capacity from renewable energy sources, such as photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, biomass generators and landfill gas. The editorial also claimed that a renewable energy standard would put Florida on a path to prosperity and create many clean jobs.

While the media likes to cheerlead the merits of renewable energy, there is another side to this story that deserves attention.

Gov. Charlie Crist has championed renewable energy options and efforts to address global warming since he took office in 2006. Last year, an energy bill was introduced that would have required utilities to generate 20 percent of their electricity from renewable

sources by 2020 and it promoted new solar development. It was approved by the Senate but the House never took the bill up before the regular session ended. This year, lawmakers have been embroiled in battles over the state’s budget, education bills, finding ways to revive the state’s economy and address high unemployment.

While it might seem like Florida lawmakers have been dragging their feet on a renewable energy standard, it’s likely they’re simply not enthusiastic about imposing mandates on utilities that would result in higher priced electricity for consumers, especially at a time of high unemployment and a weak economy.

Actually, when it comes to using renewable energy sources, the state’s larger utilities haven’t been waiting on legislative mandates. They’ve been pursuing renewable energy options by building solar projects and utilizing biomass and landfill gas for small generation plants. Seminole Electric Co-op, which supplies electricity to Clay Electric and nine other electric co-ops in Florida, is a leader in this regard, with 4 percent of its generation coming from sources like biomass and landfill gas generators. For Seminole, landfill gas is one of the most reliable and cost-effective forms of renewable energy.

Other utilities are moving forward with renewable energy projects. Last fall, a large investor-owned utility opened a large solar plant in Arcadia, Fla. that’s capable of generating 25 megawatts of electricity. A 10-megawatt solar plant at the Kennedy Space Center near Titusville began operating in April that’s capable of

Continued on page 6

