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SEN. BENNETT, SOLAR INDUSTRY CALL FOR EXPANDED SESSION AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO INCENTIVIZE USE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

TALLAHASSEE – A Senate Joint Resolution filed by Sen. Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton) proposes a constitutional amendment that, if passed by voters, would give the Legislature authority to grant an ad valorem tax exemption for renewable energy source devices, such as solar panels, and the residential and commercial properties where these devices are installed. Fixed by law, the value and the duration of the exemption would be limited to the original cost of the device or 10 years – whichever came first. During the regular 2010 session, Sen. Bennett filed identical legislation (SJR 1206), but it was not acted upon.

“There are those who will ask why I’m filing this now and why not wait until the 2011 regular session. I say, if not now, then when? For far too long we have delayed renewable energy in Florida and now we have a chance to put something in place that could have a real impact within a year or two. Homeowners and businesses would see some real savings and we’d put Florida on a path to expanding our use of renewable energy sources,” said Sen. Bennett.

This joint resolution could only be considered if the Governor or House and Senate leaders agreed to expand next week’s special legislative session to include issues beyond the constitutional amendment to ban offshore drilling sought by Gov. Crist. Timing for consideration of the renewable energy property tax exemption constitution amendment is critical as it would have to be approved by the Legislature prior to August 4 in order to be eligible for placement on the November ballot. Additionally, passage of the proposed amendment will help keep loans for purchases of renewable energy systems affordable.

“The Florida Solar Energy Industries Association applauds the efforts of the Florida Legislature for the adoption of the Property Assessed Clean Energy Loans (PACE) initiative during the 2010 Legislative Session. However, without a limit placed upon property assessments for renewable energy systems, the loans for the purchases of renewable energy systems through PACE could become cost prohibitive. We urge the Florida Legislature to take action during this special session to protect the PACE program by approving Sen. Bennett's joint resolution,” said Bruce Kershner, Executive Director of the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association.

Other benefits to the state include economic opportunity that the growing solar industry provides. Incentives such as the ad valorem tax exemption contained in this proposed amendment would help attract new businesses and jobs to Florida.

“To invest in solar, companies like ours need tax and regulatory certainty and cannot afford unexpected, additional costs to our projects. Our experience with our first investment in

Florida – a 15 megawatt solar facility in Jacksonville – has, on the whole, been positive. Unfortunately, the tax laws have been in flux and we are facing large unexpected costs. This bill, should it be ultimately approved by the House and Senate and the Florida voters in November, will give companies like ours the assurance needed to invest in this state and to create new, green jobs,” said Diana Drysdale, Vice President of Renewables for PSEG.

PSEG’s project in Jacksonville, which provides power to Jacksonville Electric Authority, has already employed 65 local craft workers and supervisors in high-paying jobs. Over the course of the project, about 100 construction jobs will have been created. Additionally, it has contributed approximately \$785,000 to the local economy.

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