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Solar industry group urges caution with renewable energy proposal

Senate bill could hurt consumers, stifle job creation

TALLAHASSEE - The state's leading solar energy industry group is calling on lawmakers to give careful consideration to a Senate proposal that would encourage utility companies to pursue large-scale renewable energy projects at a greater expense to consumers.

SPB 7082 would allow utility companies to build large-scale facilities that generate renewable energy and recover the costs - plus their profits - through ratepayers. The proposal fails to consider options for consumers to purchase their own solar energy systems and jeopardizes the viability of small business owners in the solar energy industry.

"While we applaud efforts to promote renewable energy initiatives, supporting utility-scale solar at the expense of customer-owned systems will reduce the potential for job growth and delay our state's economic recovery," said Bill Gallagher, president of the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association (FlaSEIA). "We must strike a balance."

The Senate Communications, Energy and Public Utilities Committee is scheduled to consider the newly released proposal during its 1 p.m. meeting Monday.

A recent poll commissioned by Florida TaxWatch found that 80 percent of Floridians support renewable energy and 70 percent support a \$1 a month surcharge on electricity bills that would pay for incentives for renewable energies. Those incentives could include popular rebate programs that would promote solar rooftop installations.

These efforts would help create long-term job opportunities - 40,000 jobs for installers, plumbers, electricians and engineers; \$12.2 billion in wages and \$300 million in taxes.

In contrast, utility-owned renewable energy projects such as solar farms and central solar plants provide only temporary jobs during the construction phase. SPB 7082 would allow utilities to recoup the costs of these projects directly from ratepayers.

"The message being sent with this bill seems inconsistent with Gov. Rick Scott's primary goal, which is job creation," Gallagher said.

FlaSEIA is the leading voice for contractors, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers that provide solar water heating and solar electric systems for millions of consumers across the state. For more information, visit us at www.FlaSEIA.org.