

Antonia Hover

From: Ellen Plendl
Sent: Monday, March 6, 2023 8:06 AM
To: Consumer Correspondence
Subject: Docket No. 20230000
Attachments: Untitled; In the Southeast, power company money flows to news sites that attack their critics!; Consumer Inquiry - Florida Power & Light Company

See attached customer correspondence and reply for Docket No. 20230000.

Antonia Hover

From: Beatrice Balboa <beatricebalboa@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 5, 2023 11:58 AM
To: Ellen Plendl
Attachments: PCC students injured by electric shock working on Pensacola campus.pdf; Lee County residents being charged by FPL despite having minimal electricity since Hurricane Ian - NBC2 News.pdf; Sunburn — The morning read of what's hot in Florida politics — 3.2.23.pdf; GoLocalProv _ Prov Residents and Biz Are Getting a New Electricity Co, Tied to Enviro & Political Controversies.pdf; The Challenges and Opportunities Facing Power Companies Today.pdf; FPL wants to reduce customer costs - what could you save_.pdf; Incoming Florida utility chief's priority_ no more scandals _ Reuters.pdf; FPL Customer Fuel Charges Could Drop \$379 Million, Utility Proposes _ Clearwater, FL Patch.pdf; Letters to the editor for Sunday, March 5, 2023.pdf; Florida Power and Light files plan to partially offset potential rate increase _ WEAR.pdf

Sunday 5 March 2023 1200 hours

Ellen Plendl
Regulatory Consultant
Florida Public Service Commission
Office of Consumer Assistance & Outreach
1-800-342-3552 (phone)
1-800-511-0809 (fax)

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my ongoing deepest disappointment that the electrical utility industrial sector continues to mismanage the electrical infrastructure throughout the State of Florida despite given unfettered access to elected and appointed government officials and agencies in the furtherance of policies and agendas, which consist of pursuing poorly thought out sourcing of energy resources and a decidedly anti-consumer stance with the rate-paying public across the board. Ongoing investigations continue undercover the long-standing practices by these captains of industry to extract ever larger fees and electrical rates to aggrandize their oversized ambitions by direct and indirect political arrangements in backrooms.

The attached documentation clearly indicates the ongoing conditions of the electrical infrastructure in the State of Florida as well as the lengths to which these captains of industry try to influence governmental policy makers.

Please place these observations and articles in the appropriate docket to underscore the overwhelmingly calculated cold-hearted manner that these captains seem to influence the very elected/appointed representatives that should, instead, be seeking to comfort their constituents day-to-day hardships to pay for the aggrandizement of these out sized economic sectors.

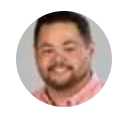
Thank you for your time in these matters and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Beatrice Balboa
1010 South Ocean Boulevard, Unit 1008

Pompano Beach, FL 33062-6631

USA

2 Pensacola Christian College students shocked, hospitalized while working near power lines



[Benjamin Johnson](#)

Pensacola News Journal

Two Pensacola Christian College students were hospitalized Thursday after an electrical mishap on campus.

In a press release, PCC said the students “experienced an electrical shock,” near power lines, but the school didn’t provide further detail.

“Earlier today, two PCC students experienced electrical shock injuries working near power lines on campus,” the release states. “Escambia County EMS, Fire and Florida Power and Light immediately responded on scene. The two students were transported to the local hospital and are receiving care.”

Last-minute cancellation: PCC cancels Grammy Award-winning King's Singers concert due to 'lifestyle concerns'

Escambia County Public Information Officer Andie Gibson told the News Journal that EMS responded around 10:53 a.m.

PCC’s Chief Communication Officer Abigail Cannon declined to provide additional detail about the nature of the work the students were performing when they were injured, saying the school will not release further information beyond the details outlined in the press release.

Lee County residents being charged by FPL despite having minimal electricity since Hurricane Ian

by **Trent Bennett** 8:41 PM EST, Thu March 02, 2023

AA

IONA MCGREGOR, Fla. — A little over five months have passed since Hurricane Ian and some people across SWFL still have little to no electricity...but are still being charged for it.

“It’s been a doozy. Today I’m fixing tree stumps in my yard. I lost 27 trees,” said Iona resident Mark Lafave.

Lafave is living in a travel trailer next to his home on Palm Rd and is using minimal electricity these days.

“I can’t live inside the house so I’ve got fans and stuff...but the air conditioning unit is broken from the storm so I don’t have lights or A/C in the house,” said Lafave.

Despite not even using electricity aside from the fans he is using to try to keep him cool, Lafave is still being charged each month by Florida Power & Light (FPL).

“My bill is like \$35 right now but when you go through what a lot of us went through that’s not easy,” said Lafave.

FPL said Lafave’s bill could be dropping in May, but not without first being raised in April.

RELATED TOPICS

Sea wall installed to protect Fort Myers Beach condo building just feet from the Gulf of Mexico

MARCH 2, 2023

Florida lawmaker introduces new bill for hurricane tax relief

MARCH 3, 2023

Advertisement

“We know that every dollar counts all the time for customers but particularly when they’re recovering from a hurricane and they are dealing with the inflation that all of us are feeling we want to do something for them,” said Chris McGrath a spokesman for FPL.

FPL said because natural gas is less expensive these days, that will be reflected on the homeowner’s bill post-May if approved.

From FPL:

Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) is proposing rate adjustments beginning in May to reduce the fuel charge on customer bills to account for a projected decline in natural gas prices. This decrease would help offset proposed increases to pay for 2022 hurricane recovery and last year’s spike in natural gas prices.

“What this means in a nutshell is we pay less, we make you pay less, and that’s the way it should be,” said McGrath.

This is the second time this year that FPL has proposed lowering the fuel charge for its customers.

“If we pay less, your bill will reflect that and so forth,” said McGrath.

This has to be passed by state regulators. If it does, the average homeowner in SWFL is looking to save \$4.50 a month on electric charges.

“Florida Power & Light seeks to reduce customers’ costs for the second time this year” via Hannah Morse of The Palm Beach Post — A sign of cooling natural gas prices, Florida Power & Light is seeking to reduce customers’ fuel charges for a second time this year. The fuel charge in the monthly bill of a typical 1,000-kilowatt-hour residential customer, including those in the former Gulf Power territory in Northwest Florida, could decrease by \$4.43 from May to December if state regulators approve the utility’s plan submitted on Wednesday. That amounts to \$379 million overall. FPL already has fuel cost adjustments on the books with the Florida Public Service Commission. Despite the proposed fuel charge decreases, monthly electric bills for the typical FPL customer will still be higher than they were in January by roughly \$13.

Prov Residents and Biz Are Getting a New Electricity Co, Tied to Enviro & Political Controversies

Thursday, March 02, 2023
GoLocalProv News Team

215
Shares

Tweet

Share

This week, Providence Mayor Brett Smiley's administration announced that nearly all city residents and businesses are being transitioned to a new municipal energy provider under the "Providence Community Electricity Program."

If you have Rhode Island Energy, you will have the new city program starting in May.

The city selected NextEra Energy to supply the electricity for the next five years -- the Florida energy conglomerate has been the focus of a range of controversies and regulatory actions.

GET THE LATEST BREAKING NEWS HERE -- SIGN UP FOR GOLOCAL FREE DAILY EBLAST

The selection of NextEra was completed by former Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza's administration. The ordinance creating the new energy structure was adopted by the Providence City Council. Six other Rhode Island communities are part of this initiative led by Providence.

On Wednesday, during a conference call between GoLocal and Providence officials Kevin Proft, Interim Director of Sustainability, and Patricia Socarras, Smiley's Director of Communications, the two were unaware of the controversies around NextEra and Florida Power and Light, which NextEra owns, nor the company's track record.

Socarras said she thought NextEra was based in Florida.

In addition, the Smiley staffers were unaware the company had been fined tens of millions of dollars for environmental, labor, and health violations by federal and state agencies.

According to the database [ViolationTracker.com](#), Florida Power & Light/NextEra has been fined in excess of \$30 million.

But more recently, the energy company has been alleged to have committed election violations and has poured tens of millions in support of GOP candidates in an effort to block environmental legislation, specifically efforts to promote renewables.

Socarras said, "We take compliance seriously, and I don't think it's fair to say that a company [that] has had fines, that they are necessarily a bad actor."

Florida Power & Light — Big Supporter of GOP and DeSantis

Florida Power & Light has poured about \$20 million in political donations from the election cycle in 2018 to this past 2022 election — the vast majority of that money went to the GOP, according to the Energy & Policy Institute.

A Democratic party whitepaper issued in September criticized the close relationship between Florida Power & Light and Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis.

"In fact, no other elected official in Florida did more to help Florida Power & Light land its \$5 billion rate increase than DeSantis — who is now running for re-election and who, campaign-finance records show, has raised more than \$3 million from FPL and a network of big-business front groups and dark-money nonprofits that the company helps to fund."

DeSantis is expected to run for the Republican nomination for President in 2024.

And, a report by ProPublica found that NextEra gave \$127,000 in corporate political donations to members of Congress who are election deniers.



*The company the City of Providence contracted to is tied to numerous regulatory violations and GOP political dirty dealing.
PHOTO: File*

Dark Money and Efforts Remove Pro-Environment Legislators

In July 2022, the Guardian published a major expose´ titled, “Leaked: US power companies secretly spending millions to protect profits and fight clean energy.”

The investigation uncovered a range of damning communications:

“The CEO of the biggest power company in the US had a problem. A Democratic state senator was proposing a law that could cut into Florida Power & Light’s (FPL) profits. Landlords would be able to sell cheap rooftop solar power directly to their tenants – bypassing FPL and its monopoly on electricity.

“I want you to make his life a living hell ...



[VIEW LARGER +](#)

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis - close ties to NextEra Energy.
PHOTO: DeSantis

seriously,” FPL’s CEO Eric Silagy wrote in a 2019 email to two of his vice-presidents about state Senator José Javier Rodríguez, who proposed the legislation.

Within minutes, one of them forwarded the directive to the CEO of Matrix, LLC, a powerful but little-known political consulting firm that has operated behind the scenes in at least eight states.

Rodríguez was ousted from office in the next election. Matrix employees spent heavily on political advertisements for a candidate with the same last name as Rodríguez, who split the vote. That candidate later admitted he was bribed to run.

Hundreds of pages of internal documents – which are only coming to light now because Matrix’s founders are locked in an epic feud – detail the firm’s secret work to help power companies like FPL protect their profits and fight the transition to cleaner forms of energy.

As a result of that report and other investigations, Silagy and the company have been tied to allegations of campaign finance violations, media manipulation, and the surveillance of critical journalists. Silagy, CEO since 2014, will depart the company in April.



[VIEW LARGER +](#)

Eric Silagy, president and CEO of Florida Power & Light Company is being forced to step down PHOTO: U of Florida system

Killing 150 Bald and Golden Eagles

Even the U.S. Department of Justice has taken recent enforcement actions against the company. In April of 2022, ESI Energy Inc. (ESI) was sentenced in Cheyenne, Wyoming, for violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), announced Assistant Attorney General Todd Kim for the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division and U.S. Attorney L. Robert Murray for the District of Wyoming.

ESI is a wholly-owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources LLC, which in turn is a wholly-owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Inc. ESI owns other companies, many of which operate wind energy generation facilities throughout the United States, including in Wyoming, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, North Dakota and Michigan, as well as other states.

ESI pled guilty to three counts of violating the MBTA, each based on the documented deaths of golden eagles due to blunt force trauma from being struck by a wind turbine blade at a particular facility in Wyoming or New Mexico, where ESI had not applied for the necessary permits. ESI further acknowledged that at least 150 bald and golden eagles have died in total since 2012, across 50 of its 154 wind energy facilities. 136 of those deaths have been affirmatively determined to be attributable to the eagle being struck by a wind turbine blade.



[VIEW LARGER +](#)

Providence Residents and Businesses Are Not Alone

"All Providence residential and business electricity customers currently using Rhode Island Energy's Last Resort Service will be automatically enrolled in the Providence Community Electricity Program's standard electricity option as of their May 2023 meter read date. The electricity rates will be fixed over an initial six-month period from May 2023 through November 2023," said the Smiley administration.

The electricity rates offered will only be fixed over an initial six-month period from May 2023 through November 2023.

According to the city, Providence is part of a group of seven municipalities launching the state's first municipal aggregation programs, including Barrington, Central Falls, Narragansett, Newport, Portsmouth, and South Kingstown.

"Each community is launching their own distinct program in May 2023, but by combining their buying power to procure a common electricity supplier, Next Era Energy Services, the communities were

able to secure an electricity supply with a lower rate and more renewable energy than RI Energy's supply option," according to

the announcement from the Smiley administration.

The company did not respond to phone calls or email requests for comment.

NextEra received multi-million fines from DOJ.

able to secure an electricity supply with a lower rate and more renewable energy than RI Energy's supply option," according to the announcement from the Smiley administration.

The company did not respond to phone calls or email requests for comment.

The Challenges and Opportunities Facing Power Companies Today

The power system is changing and electricity suppliers need to adapt or get left behind. Experts weigh in on what leaders should be focusing on and how these items will affect utilities in the future.

The power industry has experienced a whirlwind of activity in recent years. In fact, some insiders might argue that there's never been more change in the power system since the grid's inception than what we've seen over the past 10 to 15 years. The transformation goes beyond just the forms of generation being deployed; it also extends to technology utilized to operate and monitor the system, customer and employee expectations, and what it means to be sustainable. Looking ahead, artificial intelligence and machine learning could result in even greater changes in the not-to-distant future.

"Many utilities have been investing time and capital into becoming more than just providers of reliable service. Customers expect predictable and affordable electric service, but the level of service, bill transparency, triage and restoration from outages, as well as menu of additional and complementary services, continues to expand and evolve," Jeremy Klingel, senior partner for [West Monroe's Energy and Utilities practice](#), told *POWER*. "This isn't to take away from the commitment and complexity of remaining a provider of last resort, but an emerging requirement to further serve and collaborate with all customer classes (large, small, disadvantaged, etc.) to enable additional resiliency, support ESG [environmental, social, and governance] goals, and chart a practical path to cost-effective beneficial electrification."

Challenges Exist, Leading to Opportunities

To get a better understanding of how the landscape is changing, and what challenges and opportunities exist, *POWER* engaged with a handful of industry experts to get their perspectives (see sidebar "Power Sector Mergers and Acquisitions"). Among items they said electric utilities needed to watch were supply chain issues, decarbonization trends, workforce capabilities, and reliability and resiliency requirements.

Power Sector Mergers and Acquisitions

After a record-setting year for power and renewables mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in 2021, there was a marked reduction in deals last year. "2022 activity was down slightly but in line with what we expected given rising interest rates and the deteriorating macro environment in the back half of the year," Ryan Luther, senior vice president of [Enverus Intelligence Research](#), told *POWER*. "M&A multiples for generation pipelines have to stay competitive with the cost of new builds, so we expect M&A prices to fall this year as the Inflation Reduction Act pushes down the cost of new renewable builds. Energy storage startups have been growing rapidly and earning outsized returns, but it's a capital-intensive business and we're expecting a record level of storage deployments in 2023 and a pick-up in grid storage deals to meet those capital needs."

Jeremy Klingel, senior partner for [West Monroe's Energy and Utilities practice](#), said his group continues to see private equity firms showing interest in clean technology, renewable energy, and critical infrastructure. "While large-scale renewable energy assets/portfolios make many of the headlines due to their size, the volume and market interest in battery energy storage, energy-as-a-service providers, advanced demand response platforms/aggregators, carbon accounting, and behind-the-meter clean back-up generation technologies are experiencing a bit of a renaissance," Klingel said. "It's also important to note the growth and market interest in the service providers that design, engineer, build, and maintain both emerging and traditional grid infrastructure. Those firms will be the architects of the backbone for the clean energy transition."

GlobalData, a data and analysis solutions provider, issued a report on Feb. 3 that showed the value of power sector M&A deals completed by the industry's top 10 financial advisors last year was less than half the value of those completed by the top 10 advisors in 2021 (\$204.221 billion versus \$467.338 billion). Yet, while the value of deals was down more than 56% in the survey, the number of deals facilitated by the top 10 advisors based on volume was only down 19%.

Meanwhile, Klingel noted that a trend has developed in which utilities are spinning off businesses in competitive markets. "There are a number of regulated utilities doubling down on their core business as investor-owned utilities are considering the divestiture of their non-regulated businesses, particularly large-scale renewable portfolios," he said.

"The supply chain is all sorts of messed up," said Sarp Ozkan, vice president of Commercial Product at [Enverus](#). "From the general supply chain issues globally, to the Auxin anti-dumping/anti-circumvention inquiry, to Biden's temporary freeze on tariffs

from select countries, to the general increase in the minerals intensity we are going to need to realize a more than 14x increase in carbon-neutral technologies, these all impact the energy evolution in meaningfully negative ways.”

Yet, there are a number of ways power companies can improve prospects for success in the near- to mid-term. Scott Tinkler, a managing director and global utilities lead at [Accenture](#), said, “Acquiring the talent for the energy transition is paramount, starting with identifying all the skills needed, and then training and reskilling workers to do these jobs.”

Tinkler continued: “Becoming more resilient to energy shocks is also critical, which will require more effective management of cost structures to combat inflation and high interest rates while reimagining supply chain operations to balance global disruptions. Looking a bit further forward, some important areas include grid modernization to support the rapid development of low-carbon infrastructure, and accelerating the shift to clean energy technologies and integrating more renewables into their generation portfolios. Lastly, reevaluating strategies and approaches to regulatory affairs, including rate case development, permitting, and consenting will be vital.”

Tony Carrino, director of Power and Utilities with [Solomon Associates](#), suggested utility leaders should take a good look at their assets and develop plans to adjust resources to better fit the future. “The potential exists for a significant revaluation of generation assets by technology in the coming years. It will affect changes in book value of installed generation assets,” he said. “While some asset types will more quickly lose favor, others will be deemed more necessary, resulting in a repricing of assets in purchases and sales. This repricing will likely occur for two reasons: the relative environmental impacts of each generation technology and the realization of what becomes the ‘optimum mix’ of generation technologies to recover and sustain electric grid reliability.”

Added West Monroe’s Klingel, “Decarbonization gets a significant amount of airtime and tends to center on utilities’ own generation fleets many times. While that transition to cleaner fuel should continue, the move to a more sustainable energy economy will be greatly fueled by the commercial and industrial (C&I) sector. We are approaching a bit of an inflection point where utilities can become a partner to the C&I market and help guide that journey to cleaner, more efficient energy operations. However, it will require an enhanced tool kit of distributed resources to complement and, at times, supplement traditional T&D [transmission and distribution] infrastructure.”

Klingel suggested investments in resiliency are important (Figure 1). “Resiliency cannot be undervalued, yet it is difficult to value in the traditional (utility) capital investment sense,” he said. “Climatic events, wildfires, hurricanes, or polar vortex are year-round and not just an occasional black swan. The balance between physical infrastructure investment and virtual infrastructure to balance and bolster the grid is going to be critical.”



1. Underground power lines are more reliable than overhead lines, particularly during hurricanes and severe weather. Florida Power and Light says it has been installing underground service for decades and has about 45% of its distribution system underground today. The work shown here was done in Port Charlotte, Florida, after Hurricane Ian. Source: POWER

How the IRA Is Influencing the Industry

Heading into 2023, one of the most impactful drivers influencing U.S. power markets (see sidebar “2022 Record Year for Corporate PPAs”) has been the significant incentives contained in the historic Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed in August last year. “These incentives can supercharge investment in solar, wind, and energy storage—along with tax credits that will buoy market prices for carbon-free nuclear power,” said Tinkler. “There will also be significant opportunities for power and utility companies to drive growth from clean hydrogen to put it at par with conventional hydrogen, with the ability to pair credits with renewable energy projects. Headwinds impacting this clean energy surge include continued supply chain-related challenges, and managing persistent inflation and its impact on costs and customer affordability.”

2022 Record Year for Corporate PPAs

The [American Clean Power Association \(ACP\)](#) released a report on Jan. 18 showing corporations had set a new record for energy purchases last year. The ACP said commercial and industrial (C&I) companies are driving demand for renewable power and accelerating the clean energy transition through purchases of electricity directly from wind, solar, and energy storage plants.

“Even as power purchase agreement (PPA) prices increased, corporations purchased nearly 20 gigawatts (GW) of clean energy in 2022, more than 4 GW higher than any previous year. By the end of the year, over 300 corporations had contracted more than 77 GW of clean energy,” the ACP said.

“Economic and environmental benefits, as well as growing pressure on corporations to meet sustainability targets, have led to a 100-times increase in corporate clean power procurement over the past decade. During that same period, solar and wind costs have decreased 71% and 47% respectively, making both more attractive to corporate energy buyers,” JC Sandberg, interim CEO and Chief Strategy Officer at the ACP, said in a statement announcing findings from the report.

The ACP said 326 companies had PPAs in place for at least some of their power at the end of the year, led by Amazon (Figure 2), Meta, and Google. Technology companies have contracted more clean energy than any other industry, according to the ACP.



2. Amazon announced on Jan. 31 that it had set a new record for “most renewable energy purchased by a single company.” Its renewable energy portfolio now totals more than 20 GW across 401 projects in 22 countries, including 8.3 GW through 133 new projects added in 2022. Courtesy: Amazon

Prices for solar PPAs have continued to increase in North America, according to LevelTen Energy, a provider of renewable transaction infrastructure, but the company said wind PPA prices fell in the fourth quarter of 2022 for the first time in nearly two years. LevelTen Energy reported its P25 wind index, which represents the market average of the 25th percentile PPA price, dropped 1.9% to \$48.71 per MWh. Meanwhile, it said solar PPA prices climbed 8.2% to \$45.66 per MWh.

“We hope that falling wind prices mean that they are beginning to stabilize, thanks to factors like the Inflation Reduction Act,” Gia Clark, senior director of Developer Services at LevelTen Energy, said in a statement issued with the report. Clark said solar prices continue to increase because of stiff supply chain challenges. “The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), while an important safeguard of human rights, has slowed module imports to a trickle, impacting project development schedules and prices, and PPA deals. Hopefully UFLPA compliance procedures will become more efficient so that we can see some relief for solar prices, too,” she said.

“The increasing tax credits that are going to be created by the IRA will need to be monetized,” said Ozkan. “With transferability (the ability to sell tax credits for cash), tax credits will be sold for less than 100 cents on the dollar. Tax equity structures will be more adept at utilizing tax credits more efficiently, but continue to be useful to only those who can get it. So, how well the tax credits can be monetized via transferability will eventually become an issue for how well capitalized these projects will be.”

But Carrino suggested more needs to be done to enhance the power grid itself. “In the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, the proportion of spending allocated to new wind and solar project development is far greater than what is allocated to high-voltage transmission systems. In fact, the transmission grid continues to lose ground to new renewable projects, causing increasing curtailments of renewables because the transmission system has not kept up in several U.S. markets,” Carrino said. “The UK electric market is a great example of the high consumer prices that result when payments are made to curtail over-generation from renewables while other generation still must run due to system imbalances,” he added.

Noting similar worries, Klingel said, “We cannot underestimate the importance of underlying infrastructure, particularly in the transmission and distribution space. The system upgrades required to support things like building electrification, new electric vehicle [EV] load, and economic development will be critical and many times costly. The timing of those investments must be balanced and thoughtful, and I don’t think anyone has completely cracked the code, or that there’s a ready-made blueprint,” he said.

Enverus is likewise concerned. Said Ozkan, “We are particularly concerned about transmission. The IRA was great for renewables and carbon-neutral technology investments in general, but what was markedly missing was any incentives for the grid buildout necessary to handle the changes. The lack of investment in the grid has been disillusioning for those who have been looking at the big picture of the energy evolution and its needs.”

Ozkan noted developers and end-consumers are showing frustration as more projects become contingent on high interconnection costs and reliability continues to be an issue on extreme-weather days. “Currently, it all lives and dies with the

IRA,” he said. “Understanding well the opportunities to take advantage of the adders that take the tax credits even higher will be important.”

Power Market Wild Cards

The evolution of decarbonization strategies is sure to transform the power system further. Accenture is focused on three potentially important market drivers. “Among the exciting trends we’re watching is how fast EV demand can be met and charging infrastructure can be rolled out to meet this demand. Another is how clean hydrogen can be integrated into power markets. A third is how the drive for net-zero emissions is requiring power companies and all stakeholders to think beyond electricity to envision how the power market will integrate with economic sectors such as natural gas, transportation, water, and waste,” Tinkler said.

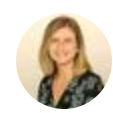
Referencing a recent study, Tinkler explained how a UK vehicle-to-grid charging infrastructure project (Figure 3) had enabled more than three million “free” miles for customers, who had made money by exporting electricity stored in their EVs back to the grid at peak times. “Opportunities like this are extremely exciting,” he said.



3. Vehicle-to-grid (V2G) charging can benefit both electric vehicle (EV) owners and the power grid. V2G technology works by using EV batteries to charge when demand is low and to supply energy to the grid when demand is high. To do so, the EV needs to have smart charge technology and the grid needs to have dynamic load management capability. Source: Envato Elements

“We are at the dawn of a next-generation power market, one where utilities will play a prominent role, but requires an unprecedented level of collaboration and investment from federal and state governments, commercial entities, the financial community, and all of us as customers,” concluded Klingel.

Florida Power & Light seeks to reduce customers' costs for the 2nd time this year



[Hannah Morse](#)

Palm Beach Post

A sign of cooling natural gas prices, Florida Power & Light is seeking to reduce customers' fuel charges for a second time this year.

The fuel charge in the monthly bill of a typical 1,000 kilowatt-hour residential customer, including those in the former Gulf Power territory in Northwest Florida, could decrease by \$4.43 from May to December, if state regulators approve the utility's plan submitted on Wednesday. That amounts to \$379 million overall.

More: Brace yourself for Florida Power & Light bills to increase at least thrice in 2023

More: FPL seeks to raise monthly power bills for residential customers by 10%

FPL already has fuel cost adjustments on the books with the Florida Public Service Commission. In January, the utility proposed recovering from customers \$2.1 billion in fuel costs that it did not collect in 2022, which would happen over a 21-month period starting in April. Additionally, it asked regulators to reduce its projected fuel spending in 2023 by \$1 billion over a nine-month period.

The Juno Beach-based utility had also requested to recover \$1.3 billion over 12 months from customers for restoration costs following Hurricanes Ian and Nicole.

Taking these costs into account, the proposed April bill of a typical FPL residential customer is \$142.88 and \$173.09 for a customer in Northwest Florida.

But those bill estimates aren't set in stone. When the January plan goes before the Florida Public Service Commission on March 7, regulators might approve a plan to spread the leftover costs of previous hurricanes in Northwest Florida to all FPL customers. That would reduce the storm cost of a former Gulf Power customer who uses 1,000 kilowatt hours of energy by \$10, but increase the bill of a typical FPL customer by about \$1.

Despite the proposed fuel charge decreases, monthly electric bills for the typical FPL customer will still be higher than they were in January by roughly \$13.

Incoming Florida utility chief's priority: no more scandals

By Laila Kearney



Trucks of the Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) are seen ahead of the arrival of Hurricane Dorian in Daytona Beach, Florida, U.S. August 31, 2019. REUTERS/Marco Bello/File Photo



Exxon Mobil
Corp

Follow



Chevron Corp

Follow



Nextera
Energy Inc

Follow



Nextera
Energy
Resources, Llc

Follow



Florida Power
& Light Co -
FLPTL.PK -
DELISTED

Follow




NEW YORK, Feb 28(Reuters) - The new head of Florida Power & Light (FP&L) has at least one important objective above and beyond running U.S. power giant NextEra's crown jewel utility, analysts say: stay out of the headlines.

Armando Pimentel, who held executive roles in finance at NextEra for more than a decade before retiring in 2019, is coming back in what investors hope will mark the end of FP&L's era of political and campaign-finance scandals.

Advertisement · Scroll to continue

Report an ad

"They probably chose him to be a steady the ship-type figure," said Jack Dearing, an analyst with Washington-based Capstone LLC, which advises investors and companies on policy issues.



Register for free to Reuters
and know the full story

Register now

Pimentel replaces outgoing FP&L CEO Eric Silagy, who joined NextEra roughly two decades ago, worked as a top lobbyist for the company and has been at the center of some of its publicity problems.

Since 2020, Florida-based news organizations have reported about FP&L's role in questionable political and campaign finance-related activity.

Latest Updates

- Cuba's president meets CEO of Russia's Rosneft amid fuel shortage
- Exclusive: Russia set to mothball damaged Nord Stream gas pipelines - sources
- China leans on coal amid energy security push
- Oil settles up on China demand hopes, posts weekly gain
- France's nuclear output hit by strike at EDF

In one Orlando Sentinel article, Silagy was accused of working with a political consultant to harass a Democratic state senator who introduced legislation unfavorable to FP&L. The Miami Herald and others reported claims that company executives worked with a consultant to derail certain state senate candidates and surveil a journalist who wrote critically about the regulated utility.

Shares of NextEra sank late last month by nearly 9%, their biggest daily drop in more than two years, after the company abruptly announced Silagy would retire under the threat of a formal investigation by the Federal Election Commission into the company's political giving.

Advertisement · Scroll to continue

Report an ad

An internal NextEra investigation found no wrongdoing, executives on the company's latest earnings call said, adding that Silagy's departure was unrelated to any controversies.

Pimentel has been a well-known but low-key power industry figure whose familiarity with NextEra suggests he will provide consistent leadership for with NextEra's top subsidiary, said Glenrock Associates utility analyst Paul Patterson.

"I don't expect much of a change, leaving aside all of the stuff going on with the outgoing CEO," Patterson said. "I don't think you're going to see any headlines like that (with Pimentel)."

Pimentel was CEO of NextEra Energy Resources, the company's unregulated arm focused on renewable power, for eight years before retiring in 2019. He was previously chief financial officer of NextEra Energy, a partner at Deloitte & Touche and an accounting fellow at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

A former NextEra colleague of Pimentel's, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Pimentel was a "straightforward, fact-based and driven" coworker with a calm temperament. He helped build NextEra Energy Resources and seemed to choose his retirement as opposed to being forced out, the former colleague said.

"We have welcomed Armando Pimentel back to our company and have confidence that he will use his deep industry and company experience to further strengthen the FPL organization," NextEra Energy spokesperson David Reuter said.

An early adopter of renewable power generation, NextEra is the third-largest U.S. energy company by market capitalization behind Exxon Mobil ([XOM.N](#)) and Chevron ([CVX.N](#)). The company was trading well above its peers before news that Silagy would leave his post this month and depart the company in mid-May.

Some critics of Florida Power & Light, like Alissa Jean Schafer of watchdog group Energy Policy Institute, have welcomed Pimentel's uneventful background.

But it will be take more than a change of guard for the utility to shake off the scandals that took place under Silagy, said Schafer.

"Even if you put somebody who is a perfectly fine individual with a financial background and doesn't have this aggressive history... it doesn't necessarily make up for the fact of all that did happen in very recent history," Schafer said.

FPL Customer Fuel Charges Could Drop \$379 Million, Utility Proposes

Florida Power & Light Co. filed a plan Wednesday to reduce charges by \$379 million to its 11 million Florida customers starting in May.



D'Ann Lawrence White, Patch Staff

Posted Wed, Mar 1, 2023 at 10:52 am ET Updated Wed, Mar 1, 2023 at 11:37 am ET

[Reply](#)



Florida Power & Light Co. filed a plan Wednesday to reduce fuel charges by \$379 million to its 11 million Florida customers beginning in May to partially offset proposed bill increases to pay for last year's two hurricane restorations. (Mark Telhiard/FPL)

JUNO BEACH, FL — [Florida Power & Light Co.](#) filed a plan Wednesday to reduce fuel charges by \$379 million to its 11 million Florida customers beginning in May to partially offset proposed bill increases to

pay for last year's two hurricane restorations and high fuel costs.

The proposal filed with the Florida Public Service Commission would reduce the fuel charge on the typical 1,000-kilowatt residential customer bill by \$4.43 a month, including taxes and fees, from May through December, reflecting a second cut in projected natural gas costs for 2023 after last year's high levels.

Interested in local real estate? Subscribe to Patch's new newsletter to be the first to know about open houses, new listings and more.

Your email address

Let's go!

FPL supplies electric service in most of the territory along the east coast of Florida (except the Jacksonville area and four other municipalities which have municipal electric systems), the agricultural area around southern and eastern Lake Okeechobee, the lower west coast area, and portions of central and north central Florida.

"This is good news for customers," said Armando Pimentel, president and CEO of FPL. "We recognize that sharp inflation is impacting our customers and that every dollar counts which is why we are pleased to provide relief to customers as fuel prices have moderated."

The commission is considering proposals FPL submitted in January to increase customer bills in April to recover \$1.3 billion in incremental restoration costs from hurricanes Ian and Nicole and \$2.1 billion to make up for higher-than-projected natural gas costs in 2022.

To partially offset these proposed increases, FPL's January filing also called for decreasing projected 2023 fuel charges by \$1 billion due to an expected drop in natural gas prices below original projections. Wednesday's proposal to reduce fuel charges by \$379 million is in addition to the earlier \$1 billion proposed reduction.

Even with the increase in natural gas prices in recent years, natural gas remains far more cost-effective than fuel oil and coal to generate electricity, said Pimentel.

FPL's decision in the early 2000s to seek energy independence and modernize its generating fleet by moving away from foreign oil and constructing ultra fuel-efficient clean energy centers as well as America's largest solar expansion has saved customers more than \$14 billion while dramatically reducing carbon emissions, he said.

Pimentel said FPL's solar fleet — the largest in America — doesn't use fuel at all to generate electricity, avoiding about \$375 million in fuel costs in 2022 alone. FPL brought 13 solar energy centers online so far this year and will add three more solar plants in 2023 as part of plans to install 90,000 megawatts of solar energy in Florida and massively expand battery storage over the next two decades.

With the bill increase proposed to take effect in April, FPL is encouraging customers to take steps now to lower their bills by monitoring energy use and making their homes more energy efficient.

For example:

- Depending on the season, customers should cool their home at 78 degrees or warmer or heat their home at 68 degrees or cooler. Each degree customers lower or increase the temperature on their thermostat can reduce their bill by 5 percent a month for heating or cooling costs.
- Customers can clean the lint filter in their dryer before each load to minimize drying time.
- Turn off ceiling fans and lights in unoccupied rooms.
- View daily, weekly and monthly energy use by using the FPL Mobile App, which is available on the Apple App store, Google Play or by texting "App" to MyFPL (69375).
- Customers can activate the free FPL Energy Manager tool to monitor how their home is using energy and identify ways to save.
- For more helpful tips, customers can visit [FPL.com/waystosave](https://www.fpl.com/waystosave).

The country's largest electric utility, Florida Power & Light serves more than 5.8 million accounts.

Donalds wrong about wind, solar

Our Congressman Byron Donalds attacks the “dishonest fantasy” of wind and solar power, saying they’re too expensive, unreliable and environmentally degrading, and that support for renewable energy is based on “politics” rather than “objective facts.” That’s wrong and beneath the dignity of his office. Wind and solar are in fact cheaper than fossil fuels and nuclear, due to low construction costs, rapid build times, and zero fuel expense, and getting cheaper all the time. According to Bloomberg, new wind and solar capacity is about 40 percent cheaper than new coal and gas capacity, all over the world.

As proof of unreliability and environmental harm, Rep. Donalds cites blackouts in Texas and California, which are making increasing use of wind and solar. But neither of those states’ problems had anything to do with wind and solar. According to Yale research, the culprit in Texas was a record freeze, crippling components in their natural gas and nuclear systems. And likewise, the culprit in California was fossil fuel systems melted by record-setting heat waves. And obviously, these instances of extreme heat and cold are only getting worse, and are driven by the warming of the planet, which is driven by – wait for it – our continuing burning of fossil fuels.

Why is Rep. Donalds so keen on the so-called “dishonesty” of renewable energy? Perhaps it’s mere coincidence that he received \$55,000 in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry, and that Florida Power and Light, which gets the vast majority of its electricity from fossil fuels, spends millions on elections and lobbying, and has fought tooth and nail to kill rooftop solar in Florida.

The “objective fact” is that the Sunshine State has vast solar potential (but negligible wind). Cities such as Tallahassee and Orlando have committed to using 100 percent renewable energy. If Rep. Donalds weren’t so overwhelmed with politics, he might do his constituents a huge favor by working to make Florida a leader in home-grown solar jobs and economic development.

Scott Wallace, Naples

Florida Power and Light files plan to partially offset potential rate increase

by Kai Davis
Thu, March 2nd 2023, 6:49 PM EST



Promoted Links

Wednesday's proposal would reduce the fuel charge on the typical 1,000 kWh residential customer bill by \$4.43 a month, including taxes and fees, from May through December.

"This is good news for customers," Armando Pimentel, president and CEO of FPL said. "We recognize that sharp inflation is impacting our customers and that every dollar counts which is why we are pleased to provide relief to customers as fuel prices have moderated."

Antonia Hover

From: Beatrice Balboa <beatricebalboa@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 24, 2023 8:55 AM
To: Ellen Plendl
Subject: In the Southeast, power company money flows to news sites that attack their critics?!
Attachments: Fort Myers Beach could sit in darkness for months as millions in funding hang in limbo - ABC7 Southwest Florida.pdf; Power company money flows to media attacking critics in Florida, Alabama _ NPR.pdf

Friday 24 February 2023 0900 hours

Ellen Plendl
Regulatory Consultant
Florida Public Service Commission
Office of Consumer Assistance & Outreach
1-800-342-3552 (phone)
1-800-511-0809 (fax)

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my ongoing deepest disappointment that the electrical utility industrial sector continues to mismanage the electrical infrastructure throughout the State of Florida despite given unfettered access to elected and appointed government officials and agencies in the furtherance of policies and agendas, which consist of pursuing poorly thought out sourcing of energy resources and a decidedly anti-consumer stance with the rate-paying public across the board. Ongoing investigations continue undercover the long-standing practices by these captains of industry to extract ever larger fees and electrical rates to aggrandize their oversized ambitions by direct and indirect political arrangements in backrooms.

The attached documentation clearly indicates the ongoing conditions of the electrical infrastructure in the State of Florida as well as the lengths to which these captains of industry try to influence governmental policy makers.

Please place these observations and articles in the appropriate docket to underscore the overwhelmingly calculated cold-hearted manner that these captains seem to influence the very elected/appointed representatives that should, instead, be seeking to comfort their constituents day-to-day hardships to pay for the aggrandizement of these out sized economic sectors.

Thank you for your time in these matters and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Beatrice Balboa
1010 South Ocean Boulevard, Unit 1008
Pompano Beach, FL 33062-6631
USA

Fort Myers Beach could sit in darkness for months as millions in funding hang in limbo

 By **Gage Goulding** 2 hours Ago

FORT MYERS BEACH, Fla. – As the sun sets on Fort Myers Beach, it takes any remaining light with it. Every night, the island enters near-total darkness as nearly all of the street lights are still broken or completely destroyed by Hurricane Ian.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach is now working on a solution to try and fix and re-light the island.

In the Southeast, power company money flows to news sites that attack their critics

December 19, 2022 5:00 AM ET

Heard on *All Things Considered*



DAVID FOLKENFLIK

MARIO ARIZA

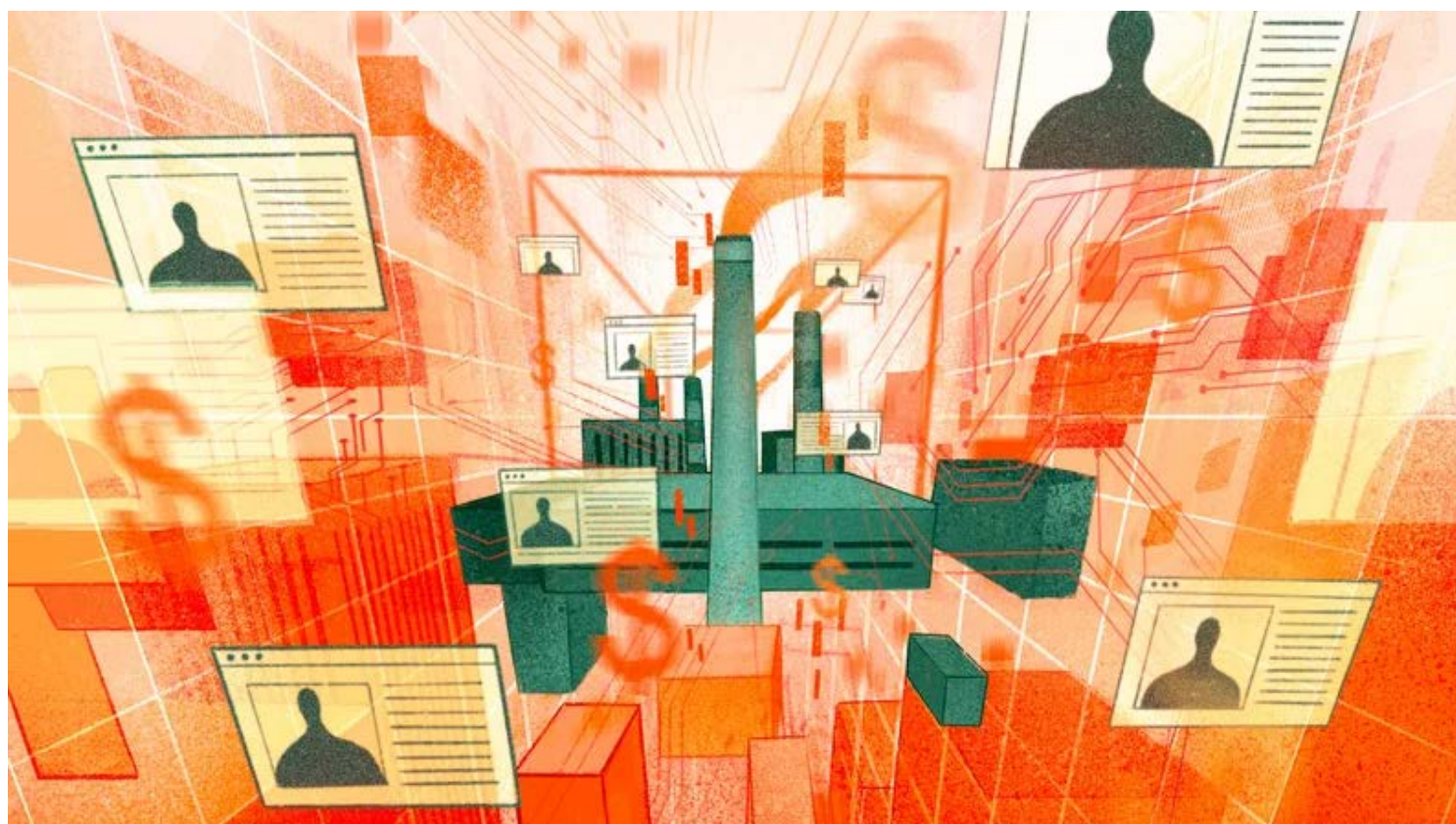
MIRANDA GREEN

7-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST

Download

Transcript



Two regional utilities, Alabama Power and Florida Power & Light, hired the consulting firm Matrix to help shape their fortunes. Matrix paid six news sites that attacked officials who challenged the companies.

Tracy J. Lee for NPR

NPR's David Folkenflik reported this story with Mario Ariza and Miranda Green of Floodlight, a nonprofit newsroom that investigates the powerful interests stalling climate action.

Terry Dunn couldn't fathom why Alabama's residents — among the poorest in the U.S. — pay some of the nation's most expensive electricity bills.

So in 2010, Dunn ran for a seat on the state commission that sets energy prices. He promised to hold a formal rate hearing at which Alabama Power executives would have to open their financial books and answer questions, under oath and in public. That hadn't happened for nearly three decades.

After winning, Dunn says, a top lobbyist for the utility took him aside and promised he could hold his roughly \$100,000-a-year position on the commission for years — as long as he remained a team player. (Alabama Power declined to make the executive available to address the accusation; the utility and its corporate parent, Southern Company, declined all comment for this story.)

"They didn't take me serious," Dunn says now.

Dunn, a Republican and Tea Party conservative, plowed ahead. And soon enough, he found himself the target of a political pressure campaign, replete with character assassinations and online smears.

Sponsor Message

Attacks began in online news outlets in 2013. One headline in [Yellowhammer News](#) read: "Democrats Embrace Republican Public Service Commissioner Terry Dunn."

In a [June 2014 column](#), Alabama Political Reporter's editor in chief, Bill Britt, cast Dunn as a pawn of his own aide, a Democrat.

"For some Dunn is a populist hero; for others, he's a radical environmentalist," Britt wrote. He saw Dunn as manipulated by those who "find companies like Alabama Power a convenient political target."

These were devastating portrayals for Dunn in a deeply red state.

"Mostly everything was all made up," he says. "You get to thinking, 'Why are they attacking me?' I'm just telling the truth and trying to do what's right for the people."

Floodlight and NPR have not been able to independently verify whether Alabama Power directed or had prior notice of the sharply critical coverage aimed at Dunn.

In 2014, Dunn lost his reelection bid by 19 percentage points — to a catfish farmer who had previously served as a county commissioner.

Eight years after Dunn's defeat, Alabama has still not held a rate hearing on electricity prices. Alabama Power remains one of the most profitable utility companies in the country.





An orchestrated attack

Yellowhammer News and Alabama Political Reporter offer

clashing ideologies - one hardline conservative, the other centrist - and appear simply to be competitors. Owners of the two sites separately defend their coverage, saying they are independent news outlets.

Sponsor Message

In reality, they are among six news outlets across Alabama and Florida with financial connections to the consulting firm Matrix LLC, a joint investigation by Floodlight and NPR finds. The firm, based in Montgomery, Alabama, has

boasted clients including Alabama Power and another major U.S. utility, Florida Power & Light.

In addition to Yellowhammer and The Alabama Political reporter, the sites include Alabama Today, The Capitolist, Florida Politics and the now-defunct Sunshine State News.

A tally of the five still-functioning sites show they have a collective audience of 1.3 million unique monthly visitors. Many of their consumers are political professionals, business leaders and journalists — people who help set the agenda for lawmakers and talk radio shows in both states.

These readers have been unknowingly immersing themselves in an echo chamber of questionable coverage for years.

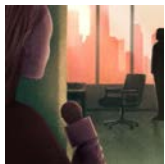
Matrix shrewdly took advantage of the [near collapse of the local newspaper industry](#) and a concurrent [plunge in trust in media](#) in propelling its clients' interests.

"The reduction in just the size of the press corps covering state government has created a vacuum that I think tends to be filled by people who have agendas beyond serving the

public interest," says former *Miami Herald* executive editor Tom Fiedler.

A core tenet of U.S. journalism holds that reporting should be fair and transparent, unaffected by financial backers who may have their own hidden interests. News outlets are supposed to hold the powerful to account and give people the knowledge to make choices as informed citizens.

The public bears the brunt of deep cuts in conventional newsroom staffs, Fiedler says, as those driving the news agenda at some newer outlets are often "the special interests - in many cases, the monied interests."



MEDIA

She was an ABC News producer. She also was a corporate operative

In Alabama and Florida, Matrix sought to ensure much coverage was secretly driven by the priorities of its clients. Payments flowed as the utilities in Florida and Alabama fought efforts to incorporate more clean energy in electric grids — a fight they are still waging.

For this investigation, Floodlight and NPR drew upon hundreds of internal Matrix documents and public records, more than three dozen interviews, a review of social media postings, and an original analysis of coverage.

Those accounts reflect a complex web of financial links, in which the six outlets collectively received, at minimum, \$900,000 from Matrix, its clients, and associated entities between 2013 and 2020.

Sponsor Message

All of the media organizations deny their coverage was shaped by those payments and deny they acted unethically.

The founder of Matrix, Joe Perkins, says the firm paid news sites only for advertising and other run-of-the-mill services for its clients. He also denies Matrix paid anything

at all to two of the sites. Beyond that, Perkins has consistently called the firm's former CEO, Jeff Pitts, a "rogue employee" and, in a lawsuit, alleges Matrix is not responsible because the former executive acted without his knowledge or his firm's consent. Pitts did not respond to several detailed requests for comment. In court filings, Pitts says Perkins knew everything—and he accused Perkins of wrongdoing.

They also cast blame on one another over a series of recent scandals. Matrix recently made headlines for surveillance of a power company CEO and a journalist who wrote critically about Florida Power & Light's business plans.

Matrix has also been accused of seeking to influence ballot initiatives on clean energy and offering a lucrative job to a public official in Jacksonville to induce him to resign.

Florida Power & Light did not respond to a detailed list of questions, and an executive for the company declined to address them in a phone call.





Payments to news sites flowed as utilities fought clean energy initiatives

Coverage of Matrix's power company clients at the six news sites ebbed and surged around election seasons and

other key inflection points. For example, Sunshine State News emerged when Sen. Rick Scott, a consistent ally of Florida Power & Light, was governor of Florida and maintained warm ties with him. Matrix records show the firm paid the site at least \$180,000. It shuttered a year after he won election to the U.S. Senate. A former Scott aide also founded The Capitolist, based in Tallahassee.

Additionally, Matrix's clients took a strong interest in who wrote the laws and enforced the regulations. Last year, Florida Power & Light wrote a bill that was passed by the Florida Legislature and that would have gutted the ability of homeowners to make money off solar panels. Gov. Ron DeSantis ultimately vetoed it.

One state away, Alabama Power runs and owns a coal-fired power plant that is the largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions in the United States.

An analysis by Floodlight and NPR of the three Alabama news sites with links to Matrix finds overwhelmingly positive coverage of Alabama Power. The review looked at articles on each site that contained the phrase "Alabama Power" and found that the vast majority of pieces either were positive or appeared to mirror a news release by the utility.

In interviews, two former reporters at the Alabama Political Reporter recounted episodes in which articles about Alabama Power received intense and unusual scrutiny from editors. In one case, the story was never published. Its proprietor denies any such influence on the site.

Together, Alabama Power and Florida Power & Light keep the lights on for nearly 7.5 million businesses and households. Since consumers' payments contribute to much of the two utilities' profits, much of the money that the companies spend effectively derives from consumers' bills.

From its creation, Matrix has focused on manipulating the media

Matrix founder Joe Perkins has long held an interest in the power of the media. As a doctoral student at the University of Alabama, he wrote his thesis about a specific quandary: How can journalists' choice of sources and anecdotes affect public sentiment?

"When a minority opinion gains access to the news media repeatedly through various techniques to make its point, it may be perceived as more widespread and pervasive than it actually is," he wrote in his 73-page paper.

He then put his research to use, building up Matrix.

In the early days, Matrix quietly sought to influence decisions over matters like who was eligible to win

contracts with the Alabama teachers pension fund. The firm eventually established a presence in 10 states.

Sponsor Message

Stealth was a hallmark of the operation. Matrix employees often created shell companies to conduct transactions for clients.

"Invisibility is more powerful than celebrity," reads a plaque hanging in Matrix's Montgomery office.

Perkins and Pitts, the CEO, were characterized by some as akin to father and son; Perkins promised to one day pass on the company. Pitts benefited from an ability to instill loyalty and fear in those who carried out his commands, according to multiple people who have worked with him. (Most Matrix associates refused to be interviewed on the

record for this story, citing the influence the two men maintain in their professional circles.)

It took the unraveling of Matrix to reveal the full extent of its influence.

At the end of 2020, Pitts left Matrix to start his own rival consulting firm called Canopy Partners. Perkins sued, accusing Pitts of secretly engaging in work for a utility based in Juno Beach, Florida while at Matrix. That is where Florida Power & Light is headquartered.

In litigation involving both men, Pitts alleged he quit Matrix over Perkins' "unethical practices," including "deploying phony groups and digital platforms to intimidate individuals as a method to influence public perception and litigation."

How Alabama Power became a digital media player

The Alabama Political Reporter and Yellowhammer News launched during the same week in 2011. They have

consistently cheered Alabama Power through overwhelmingly positive news stories.

Starting at least as far back as April 2013, Matrix paid \$8,000 a month to the Alabama Political Reporter, according to internal Matrix records. Matrix also drew up a proposed website design for the publication in June 2015, according to prototypes obtained by Floodlight and NPR.

Britt, Alabama Political Reporter's editor in chief, says he could not verify the specific Matrix payments. He mocks the authenticity of the prototype, while confirming that Matrix designed his website. Britt affirms he took money from the firm for advertising and acknowledges that Matrix also paid for reporters to do research for the firm, an atypical practice for newsrooms.

Sponsor Message

"We have to make money," Britt says.

When Alabama Power CEO Mark Crosswhite announced his retirement last month, Alabama Political Reporter posted a story written by "STAFF." It reproduced the company's press release, verbatim.

The links to Yellowhammer News are more convoluted. In 2014 — the year Terry Dunn lost his bid for reelection — he faced attacks in the online press, including in Yellowhammer News.

Floodlight and NPR were able to document a complex stream of transactions between a nonprofit run by an Alabama Power contractor and a series of nonprofits linked to Matrix and Yellowhammer News.

For example, Yellowhammer News runs the Facebook page of a nonprofit, the Alabama Free Market Alliance, which attacks renewable energy. That nonprofit received \$100,000 in 2014 from the Alabama Power-linked group, federal tax records show. All the nonprofits were involved in work that furthered the interests of Alabama Power.

"Yellowhammer Multimedia has no relationship, financial or otherwise, with Alabama Political Reporter, Matrix LLC or Alabama Free Market Alliance," Yellowhammer News owner Allison Ross says. She did not respond to questions about the site's relationship with Alabama Power.

A Florida power company CEO orders up a story at The Capitolist



Eric Silagy, the CEO of Florida Power & Light.

Bob Self/Florida Times-Union

Florida has stood out as one of Matrix's biggest successes. The firm represented several of the state's largest corporations, including a major fertilizer and sugar company as well as Florida Power & Light.

Documents obtained for this story show executives at Matrix and Florida Power & Light dictated some coverage at The Capitolist after a Matrix employee purchased an option to buy the publication in 2019 through a limited liability company.

In May 2020, The Capitolist [ran a story](#) mocking a call by the *Miami Herald* for reader donations. The headline read: "The Miami Herald has turned to begging to support their biased reporting and fear-mongering."

Emails obtained by Floodlight and NPR for this story show that Florida Power & Light CEO Eric Silagy had proposed the story to Matrix employees.

"I would think The Capitolist would have a field day with this one," Silagy wrote to Pitts on May 4, 2020. The story ran three days later. Silagy had also suggested a cartoon of a prominent *Herald* reporter, Mary Ellen Klas, "with a tin cup on the street corner." The Capitolist blasted to thousands of its email newsletter subscribers an edited image of Klas in which she holds a sign asking for "Spare change for Fake News — Miami Herald reporter needs help."

Journalism relies on a currency of trust: trust that the information provided is fairly presented. Trust that there are no hidden ulterior motives driving those reports, even when news is presented with a point of view.

"If you are paid for copy, then you can't be fair," says Chuck Strouse, the former editor in chief of *Miami New Times*. "You have to acknowledge and be upfront with your reader about what exactly is happening. I mean, that's just a cardinal rule of journalism."

The editors operating the Matrix-linked sites do not appear to be following those rules.

For example, emails show that The Capitolist's editor-in-chief and publisher, Brian Burgess — once a top aide to Senator Scott back when Scott was Florida's governor — asked Matrix executives for permission to write a pro-solar energy story. The story was requested in May 2020 by one of The Capitolist's other sponsors — a public relations company.

"Sachs Media is asking me for coverage on this, but wanted to run it by you first," Burgess wrote to Abigail MacIver, the Matrix employee to whom the site was formally registered. "Need guidance on this ASAP."

Sachs Media's founder, Ron Sachs, confirms that his firm had advertised in The Capitolist.

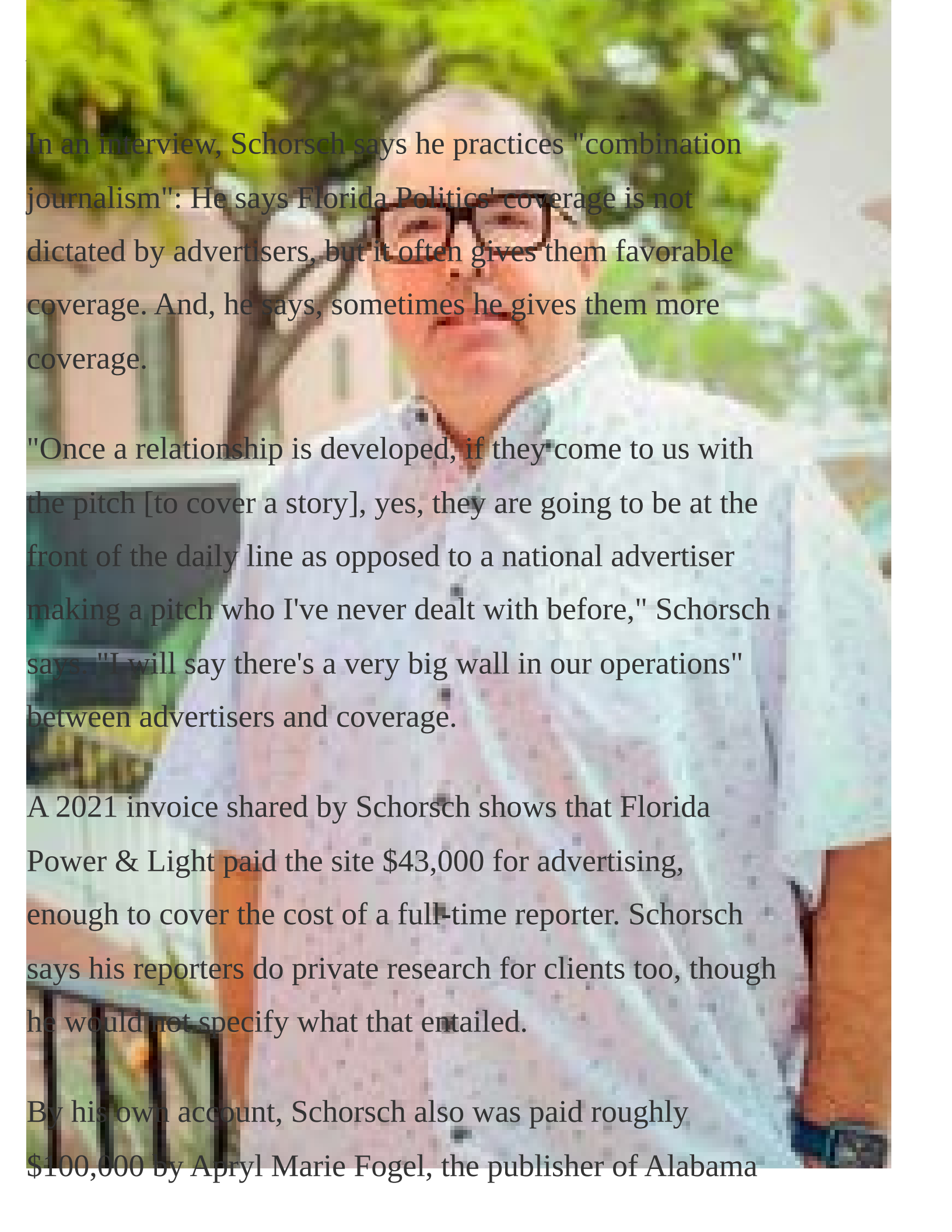
Emails show the Matrix executives ultimately agreed to let Burgess write the story because, as MacIver wrote, "it makes him look like he's not in our pocket and it isn't bad for" Florida Power & Light. (The executives were among those Matrix later sued.)

"The Capitolist stands by the accuracy of every story it has published and openly acknowledges that we bring a center-right, pro-free market editorial viewpoint to our work," Burgess writes in response to questions from NPR and Floodlight.

Advertisers receive more coverage at popular news site Florida Politics

Of all the leaders of sites with links to Matrix, only one, Florida Politics Publisher Peter Schorsch, acknowledges he doesn't observe traditional journalistic practices when deciding what to cover.



A man with glasses and a light blue shirt is sitting outdoors, possibly on a porch or patio. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is slightly blurred, showing green foliage and a wooden railing. The text is overlaid on the image in a dark, serif font.

In an interview, Schorsch says he practices "combination journalism": He says Florida Politics' coverage is not dictated by advertisers, but it often gives them favorable coverage. And, he says, sometimes he gives them more coverage.

"Once a relationship is developed, if they come to us with the pitch [to cover a story], yes, they are going to be at the front of the daily line as opposed to a national advertiser making a pitch who I've never dealt with before," Schorsch says. "I will say there's a very big wall in our operations" between advertisers and coverage.

A 2021 invoice shared by Schorsch shows that Florida Power & Light paid the site \$43,000 for advertising, enough to cover the cost of a full-time reporter. Schorsch says his reporters do private research for clients too, though he would not specify what that entailed.

By his own account, Schorsch also was paid roughly \$100,000 by Apryl Marie Fogel, the publisher of Alabama

Today, another of the Matrix-linked sites. The money went for help with "editorial and digital tech services," he tells NPR and Floodlight. Fogel, who is also former Matrix CEO Pitts' romantic partner, received more than \$140,000 from Matrix, the firm's records show. (She declines to comment on her ties to Matrix, saying "not my monkeys, not my circus.")

Schorsch calls Fogel a friend and says he did not know she was being paid by Matrix.

Sponsor Message

Ryan Ray, a Florida Politics reporter from 2014 to 2017, says Schorsch directed him to write favorably about industries that advertised with Florida Politics.

"There is no question that polluters, big special interests and others who have an interest in influencing Florida state government have paid Peter Schorsch for positive coverage or to avoid coverage," Ray tells Floodlight and NPR. "I think even he would tell you that."


Schorsch rejects that allegation.

"I don't think there's been any thumb on the scale," Schorsch says. And he defends his model of journalism.

"I'm not trying to pretend that I'm an angel or anything like that," Schorsch says. "But ... man. If I go, there's nothing left in this f***ing space. There's like the *Tampa Bay Times*, the *Miami Herald*, and you're down to nothing."

"They abandoned me. So let them struggle."



A man in a white shirt and blue jeans is walking on a grassy field. He is seen from the side, walking away from the camera. In the background, there is a chain-link fence and some utility poles. The sky is overcast.

As for Terry Dunn, he now lives more than two hours' drive from Montgomery, Alabama's capital. He left the city for good after he lost his reelection bid in 2014.

"Seeing how dirty everything was, [it's] basically just a cesspool down there," Dunn says. "I was glad to get out."

Despite believing Alabama Power sent Matrix to drag him down, Dunn has trouble separating those who created corporate propaganda from the people who swallowed it — and voted him out of office. He knows that Alabama residents' electricity rates are not appreciably better today than they were before his election. These days, what fight he had has been displaced by resentment.

"Alabamians bitched about high power bills, but when they had someone that would address it, they abandoned me," Dunn says. "So let them struggle to keep the lights on."

Antonia Hover

From: Ellen Plendl
Sent: Monday, March 6, 2023 8:06 AM
To: 'Beatrice Balboa'
Subject: Consumer Inquiry - Florida Power & Light Company

Ms. Beatrice Balboa
beatricebalboa@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Balboa:

This is in response to your February 24, 2023 and March 5, 2023 E-mails to the Florida Public Service Commission (FPSC) regarding Florida Power & Light Company (FPL).

We will add your feedback and the articles you shared to our public record.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 1-800-342-3552 or by fax at 1-800-511-0809.

Sincerely,

Ellen Plendl
Regulatory Consultant
Florida Public Service Commission
Office of Consumer Assistance & Outreach
1-800-342-3552 (phone)
1-800-511-0809 (fax)