

Antonia Hover

From: Office of Commissioner Passidomo
Sent: Friday, May 3, 2024 10:06 AM
To: Commissioner Correspondence
Subject: Docket No. 20240026
Attachments: 20240026 Schwarz 5.3.24.pdf

Please place the attached in Docket No. 20240026.

Thank you!



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** ** ** ** **

April 28, 2024

Public Service Commission
Attn: Gabriella Passidomo
2540 Shumard Oak Blvd
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0850

RE: "Obscure officials control Florida energy"

Dear Ms. Passidomo,

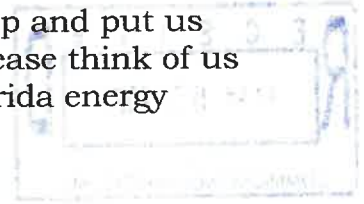
I read today's *Tampa Bay Times* article with this title and thought what else will be grabbing more dollars out of my skinny wallet! As an elderly couple living out our last days in Florida, we never thought that our one dollar would be taken from us without representation, by illusionists with non-proven records of doom and gloom unseen, would happen in front of our eyes.

Environmentally we can see how this planet is being destroyed from day one. It seems that the rush to obliterate our world has caused a 'cry wolf' mentality instead of seeking the truth in what has been done in the last 5+ years. It's not complicated. Simple sometimes is best without all of the pollutions. Clean energy is a misnomer. Put your real glasses on and check out what other countries are doing around the world, sans China.

Those of us elderly who make less than 80% or even 60% or less than the poverty rate can no longer foot the bill of fools who look the other way. Who do you think is covering these energy bills? We are. I have to cover my bills, 20 meds, utilities, a new roof next week, with my measly social security check, no pension (lost that on Black Friday). I am fully disabled. We all live in a 55+ community and can't all work. We are in our 70s, 80s, 90s, and 100s, Yea, and are these our golden year? Nope. We are only a fraction of the 4+ million people in Florida.

Contemplating a new rate hike for the Electric companies – remember all of us old ones – your grandparents and parents. We can't even enjoy our days without wondering what kind of catastrophe is coming our way.

Will you be adding another rate hike that will sink our ship and put us on the street like all those people in Tampa or Ruskin? Please think of us when you look at your long term plans for the state of Florida energy plan. Thank you



Sincerely,

Eloise Schwarz
Retired Registered Nurse
Hearing Loss Support Specialist
Advocate for Elderly/Disabled

News Extra

Obscure officials control Florida energy

BY EMILY L. MAHONEY
Times Staff Writer

You might be reading this on a phone you charged at home last night or in a newspaper illuminated by lights in your kitchen.

Either way, you probably rarely think about the company that provides your electricity, unless there's an outage or you receive a steep bill.

You likely think even less about the politicians who oversee those utility companies. But this obscure group of public officials, called the Florida Public Service Commission, has more power over your life — and the state's contributions to climate change — than you may realize.

The five people who make up the commission decide how much utility companies are allowed to charge the public for electricity, a powerful role when Floridians have no alternative choices. Whichever company is the provider for the area where you live has a monopoly for that part of the state, which is a reason why they're subject to state regulation. Some other states, like Texas, have different structures that allow the public to shop for their electricity provider.

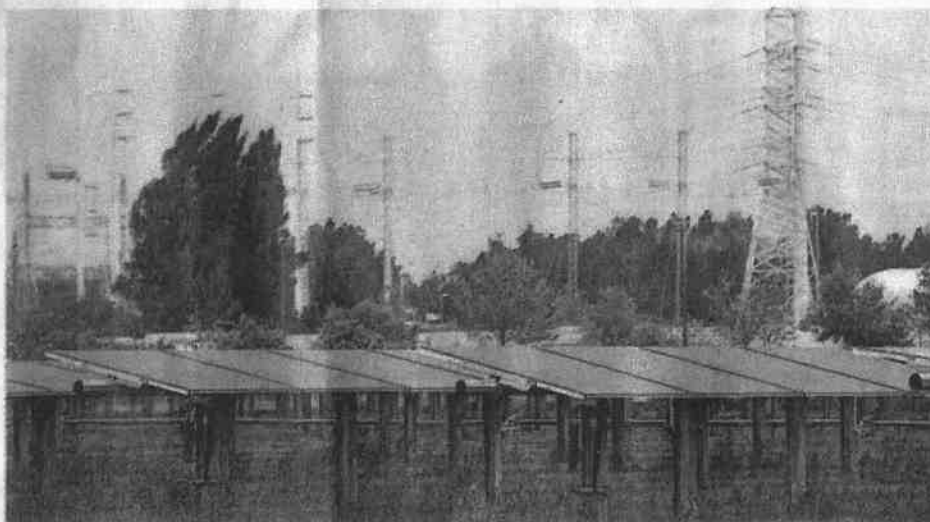
tor was the region's No. 1 source of greenhouse gases, surpassing cars and other transportation.

Florida generates about 74% of its electricity from burning natural gas, which produces fewer harmful emissions than coal but is not as clean as renewable sources like solar. That's a greater reliance on fossil fuels than the national average compiled by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, which found 60% of the U.S.'s electricity came from fossil fuels in 2023, while 19% was from nuclear energy and 21% from renewables.

While the state commission is largely out of sight, out of mind for regular Floridians, it's slated to come to Tampa Bay this summer.

Customers of Duke Energy and Tampa Electric Co. will be able to speak at several scheduled hearings in Largo and Inverness (for Duke) and Tampa (for TECO) in June as the commission deliberates about the two utilities' requests to raise base rates for consumers in 2025. Exact venues for the hearings have not been determined yet, but customers should receive notices with their bills.

They are the first local,



JEFFEREE WOO | Times

A solar farm at the TECO Big Bend Power Station in Apollo Beach. The Florida Public Service Commission has more power over your life than you may realize.

consultant. For local Duke customers, it's been 15 years.

Here's what you should know about how the commission works ahead of these hearings:

Who are the members of the Florida Public Service Commission?

They are:

- Art Graham, a former Jacksonville City Council member
- Andrew Giles Fay, a former chief deputy to Attorney General Pam Bondi
- Mike La Rosa, a former Republican member of the

previously worked in the commission's office of general counsel at the Florida attorney general's office. She is also the daughter of state Senate President Kathleen Passidomo.

All were appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, though some were first named to the commission by his predecessor, U.S. Sen. Rick Scott. The state pays each commissioner about \$150,500 annually.

The commission declined to make any of the members available for an interview, citing that state law prohib-

its University, said people started establishing these commissions about 100 years ago when they realized most utilities have monopolies.

"You would not want to go and negotiate with your power company on whether you're going to buy the line coming into your house from them or their competitors," he said. "You see pictures of old New York with 100 different power lines coming into every house ... it looks like a Charlie Chaplin movie. We need to regulate those monopolies for

cases that include expert witness testimony and cross-examinations. These monthslong proceedings are how the commission rules on utilities' requests to raise the base rates on their customers. Utilities can avoid the full extent of these proceedings by settling rate cases behind closed doors, which has become common in recent years. The commission must approve the settlement agreements.

Hearings can be filled with technical jargon and aren't often user-friendly. Because of that, the Office of Public Counsel is a special representative for the public in these cases, designated to advocate for the best interests of Floridians paying utility bills.

Integrity Florida, a non-partisan ethics watchdog group, released a report in 2017 that found Florida's Office of Public Counsel had a smaller staff than states like Maryland, Michigan and Wisconsin, which have fewer residents than Florida. That report also concluded that the state commission routinely sided with utilities on their requests, arguing it has been "captured" by the industry it regulates, costing the public in the process. The com-



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Hearing Loss Support Specialist
Get in the Hearing Loop
<http://hearingloop.org/>

"When the Godly are in authority,
the people rejoice,

But when the wicked are in power
they groan"

Proverbs 29:2