

FECA's Florida Legislative Report

April 24, 2015

One week left in the regular session and things have fallen apart. The only thing certain is the budget will require a special session or an extended session. The big excitement this week was the passage of the PSC reform bill in the House with over 30 amendments to consider, followed by the adoption of several amendments to the House's bill in the Senate. I thought this bill was sure to pass, but now it is in jeopardy. The right-of-way bill is still stuck in its last committee in the Senate, but we are working with all of the telecom and electric utilities (except the municipals) to get it to the floor, and it is a long shot at best. We are finally able to declare that the rate study bill is dead, but so is the metal theft bill.

The FIEC meeting today was long but productive. DOR testified that they do not collect the use tax on solar power consumed by customers and there was helpful testimony by the League of Cities. The only other scheduled FIEC meeting is on May 6. The Attorney General sent the solar petition to the Supreme Court today so we expect a schedule to be issued by the Court next week.

Bills That Passed and are headed to the Governor

Value Adjustment Boards - HB 489 by Rep. Sullivan (R) (SB 260 by Sen. Bradley (R)) would require the clerk of the value adjustment board (VAB), not just the property appraiser, to have available and distribute certain DOR forms relating to the VAB petition. Owners of multiple items of tangible personal property would be allowed to file a single joint petition if the property appraiser determines such items are substantially similar. The property appraiser would be required to include the property record card in an evidence list for a VAB hearing under certain circumstances.

Siting Facilities - SB 1216 by Sen. Simpson (R) (HB 933 by Rep. La Rosa (R)) would require electric utilities to notify the affected county, rather than the regional planning council as currently required, of plans to site substations, transmission lines, and power plants.

PRIORITY BILLS THAT ARE MOVING

Drones - SB 766 by Sen. Hukill (R), SB 1178 by Sen. Richter (R), and HB 649 by Rep. Metz (R) all broadly pertain to drones and would place certain restrictions on their uses. All the bills now have language that would exempt electric, gas and water utilities that use drones for purposes such as O&M of facilities, assessing vegetation in ROWs, construction, and environmental monitoring. SB 766 passed out of the Senate and is heading to the House and HB 649 is ready for the House floor. SB 1178 passed out its first committee.

Affordable Housing - SB 1520 by Sen. Soto (D) and HB 1043 by Rep. Eagle (R) would amend the Housing Authorities Law to allow a housing authority to install renewable energy devices/systems in low income housing projects solely to “reduce utility costs” to its tenants. Currently, a housing authority can install utility facilities for the sole purpose of receiving utility services from an electric utility to distribute those utility services to its tenants (similar to how an RV park provides service to its individual spaces). The new language appears to allow the housing authority to generate renewable energy and provide it to its tenants as long as it reduces the tenant’s utility costs. This provision is troubling and the obligation to reduce utility costs may be illusory since the costs associated with the renewable device may not have to be included on the tenant’s bill. HB 1043 was amended to remove the onerous language and is heading to the Senate. SB 1520 passed out of its first committee and still contains the renewable language.

Contaminated Sites - SB 1302 by Sen. Evers (R) and HB 841 by Rep. Drake (R) would require DEP to include protocols for the use of long-term natural attenuation where site conditions warrant. “Long-term natural attenuation” means natural attenuation approved by DEP as a site rehabilitation program task for a period of more than 5 years instead of expensive active remediation. A site rehabilitation program must consider the interactive effects of contaminants as one clean up criterion. The bill would change how cleanup target levels are applied when surface waters are exposed to contaminated groundwater. If alternative cleanup target levels are used, institutional controls are not required in certain circumstances. SB 1302 and HB 841 are ready for the floor in their respective chambers.

Facilities in Rights-of-way and Platted Utility Easements - SB 896 by Sen. Brandes (R) and HB 391 by Rep. Ingram (R) would require others to pay to relocate our facilities when they are located in a platted utility easement (addresses the LCEC case). It also would clarify that when our facilities are in a right-of-way the utility will be reimbursed for relocation expenses unless the situation falls into one of the enumerated exceptions. SB 896 was amended to address several concerns of the railroad companies. The amendment language alleviates the railroads' concern that the language requiring payment to a utility for relocating costs would circumvent or impair agreements between utilities and the railroads regarding their private rights-of-way. In addition, the amendment language fixes the railroads' concern that a utility could install facilities within any platted easement, even if they are not authorized to do so. The same amendment was added to HB 391 at its next stop. HB 391 is heading to the Senate and SB 896 passed out of its second committee.

Memorial to Congress Regarding EPA Regulations - SM 1228 by Sen. Evers (R) and HM 949 by Rep. Rodrigues (R) is a memorial to Congress to direct the EPA to revise the proposed regulations that address carbon dioxide emissions from existing fossil fuel fired electric generating plants. The memorial urges Congress to extend by 1 year the date states would be required to submit a plan; decrease the proposed interim and final state goals, extend by 5 years the date when the final goals for CO2 emission rates must be reached; and prohibit the retirement of an electric generating unit before the end of its useful life unless the utility has fully recovered the costs of construction and financing of the unit, the state has sufficient replacement capacity and grid reliability is maintained. HM 949 is ready for the House floor and SM 1228 passed out of its first committee.

OTHER BILLS THAT ARE MOVING

Water Bills - HB 7003 by Rep. Caldwell (R), SBs 584/586 and 918 by Sen. Dean (R), HB 1291 by Rep. Boyd (R), SB 714 by Sen. Grimsley (R) and HB 653 by Rep. Pigman (R) are bills that would increase springs protection, and would implement the recently passed constitutional amendment relating to water and land conservation and surface water classifications. SB 586 passed out of its last committee and is headed to the floor. SB 584 will go to conference to address

policy differences between the Chambers. SB 918 and SB 714 are ready for the floor. HB 7003 passed out of the House and is in the Senate. HB 653 was amended on the House floor to include the provisions of HB 7003 and is heading to the Senate. HB 1291 is ready for final passage in the House.

PSC Ethics Reform and IOU Billing Cycles/Deposits - SB 288 by Sen. Latvala (R), SB 230 by Sen. Dean (R), HB 7109 (formerly PCB EUS 15-01) by Rep. La Rosa (R), HB 219 by Rep. Peters (R), and HB 81 by Rep. Dudley (D) all broadly pertain to the PSC. SB 288 and HB 219 would subject more PSC proceedings to the prohibition against ex parte communications. If the Office of Public Council participates in a proceeding, a settlement agreement may not be submitted unless the Office of Public Council is a party to the agreement, giving them much greater leverage in settlement negotiations. SB 288 and HB 219 also would impose other PSC reforms such as requiring PSC Commissioners to undergo ethics training and requiring anyone who lobbies a member of the PSC nominating Council to register as a lobbyist. SB 288 and HB 219 also would require IOUs to notify their customers if more than one rate is available within their customer class and would prohibit deposits that exceed the average of the total charges for two months of usage. All the bills would prohibit IOUs from extending billing cycles on accounts that are served on tiered rates. HB 7109 is the House's version of a PSC reform bill. It incorporates most of the provisions in bills that have passed out of the Senate utility committee, but it does not include the provision that would require all settlements to be approved by the Office of Public Counsel. HB 7109 now contains a provision that would require a rate hearing in the districts of the IOUs at least every other year. SB 288 is ready for the Senate floor. HB 7109 passed out of both Chambers, but because of the amendment process, it will be reconsidered by the House before heading to the Governor.

Value Adjustment Boards – HB 695 by Rep. Avila (R), SB 972 by Sen. Flores (R) broadly pertain to Value Adjustment Boards (VAB). SB 972 and HB 695 would allow a corporate (non-attorney) representative to represent the taxpayer before the VAB to challenge county tax assessments. Taxpayers also could be represented by an attorney, a licensed property appraiser, a licensed realtor, a certified public accountant, or a certified tax specialist. If a county receives more than 10,000 petitions objecting to assessments, the Dept. of Revenue (DOR) must be notified

and conduct a review of the VAB proceedings. DOR would be given the authority to administratively review VABs. HB 695 is ready for final passage in the House and SB 972 is ready for the floor.

Utility Workers - SB 908 by Sen. Altman (R) and HB 231 by Rep. Passidomo would protect “vulnerable users” of public rights-of-ways, including persons working on utility facilities along roadways. The bill would require motorists to maintain at least 3 feet of space between the vulnerable user and the vehicle when passing. Violations would be non-criminal infractions and be in addition to the move over restrictions enacted last year. SB 908 is heading to the House and HB 231 is ready for the floor.

Utility Rates for Large Child Care Homes - SB 7006 by Sen. Legg (R) and HB 7017 (formerly EDC 15-01) by Rep. O’Toole (R) would add “large family day care homes” to the law that dictates utilities must bill “family day care homes” on a residential rate, even though these homes clearly have a commercial activity. SB 7006 is ready for the floor and HB 7017 is headed to the Senate.

Airport Zoning – SB 1554 by Sen. Brandes (R) would add “power generation equipment” as a defined structure and would require a permit from the Dept. of Transportation if such equipment exceeds federal obstruction standards in order to prevent airport hazards. SB 1554 passed out of its second committee.

Regulation of Oil and Gas Resources - SB 1468 by Sen. Richter (R) and HB 1205 by Rep. Rodrigues (R) would define “high-pressure well stimulation” (fracking) and would give DEP regulatory authority. DEP would also be required to monitor and inspect drilling operations during all phases of the fracking process. DEP would evaluate any past violations of rules or laws pertaining to the regulation of oil or gas by permit applicants, and a permit for fracking could be denied or increased bonding and monitoring could be imposed if the applicant has a history of violating oil or gas regulations in Florida or outside the state. Drilling any well, including fracking, would be prohibited unless a driller notifies DEP of their intention to drill, a fee is paid, and a permit is granted. DEP would have specific criteria to follow for issuing a permit to frack, ensuring that the fracking design would not contaminate groundwater and is consistent with public policy. To avoid

unnecessary duplication, the bill would prohibit other political subdivisions from adopting programs to accomplish the purposes of this law. Fracking developers would be required to provide surety, through bonds or other cash securities, that their operations would be conducted in a safe manner. DEP would conduct a study on fracking and submit its findings to the Governor and the Legislature by March 1, 2016. The Department would also adopt rules to implement the findings of the study and recommend legislation if it is needed to protect groundwater. The national chemical registry, FracFocus, would be designated as Florida's registry for chemical disclosure for all fracking sites. SB 1468 is ready for the floor and HB 1205 is ready for final passage.

Public Records Exemption for High-pressure Well Stimulations (Fracking) - SB 1582 by Sen. Richter (R) and HB 1209 by Rep. Rodrigues (R) would allow trade secrets relating to fracking held by DEP through the national chemical disclosure registry to be exempt from public records laws if requested by the driller.

Confidential and exempt trade secrets may be disclosed in certain legal proceedings. SB 1582 is ready for the floor and HB 1209 is ready for final passage in the House.

BILLS THAT HAVE BEEN WITHDRAWN OR APPEAR TO BE DEAD

Renewable Energy Third-Party Sales - SB 1118 by Sen. Brandes (R) and HB 1077 by Rep. Ahern would allow third parties ("parties") to install renewable generators and to sell the power to others that are located within the same parcel or on an immediately adjacent parcel.

Electric Rate Study - SB 1062 by Sen. Stargel (R) and HB 777 by Lake Ray (R) would require a study that compares electric utility rates and assess each utility's expenses for each rate class.

Gainesville Regional Utilities Commission - HB 1325 by Rep. Perry (R) is a local bill that would add Article VII to the charter of the City of Gainesville creating a regional independent utilities commission called the Gainesville Regional Utilities Commission (GRUC).

Secondary Metal Recyclers - SB 618 by Sen. Grimsley (R) and HB 813 by Rep. Combee (R) would improve the regulation of metal recyclers and reduce copper theft.

Texting While Driving – SB 246 by Sen. Sachs (D), SB 192 by Sen. Altman (R) and HB 1313 by Rep. Slosberg (D) would make a violation of the Texting While Driving Law a primary offense instead of a secondary offense. SB 492 by Sen. Thompson (D) and HB 17 by Rep. Slosberg (D) would prohibit the use of cell phones and other electronic communication devices (even if the driver is using hands free technology) in all school zones and like areas.

Transportation – SB 1186 by Sen. Brandes (R) would create the Northwest Florida Regional Transportation Finance Authority.

Economic Development - SB 1556 by Sen. Montford (D) and HB 903 by Rep. Porter (R) would allow certain new and existing businesses that receive a tax credit under the Rural Job Tax Credit Program to become eligible for a tax refund of up to 50% of the amount of sales tax paid for electricity by the business.

Assault or Battery on Utility Workers - SB 660 by Sen. Soto (D) would make assaults against utility workers and firefighters subject to the same increased criminal penalties that apply to assaults on law enforcement personnel.

Constitutional Amendment to Exempt Renewable Energy Devices from Ad Valorem and Tangible Personal Property Taxes - SJR 400 and SB 402 by Sen. Brandes (R).

Renewable Exemption from Ad Valorem Taxes and Renewable Energy Source Device Exemption - HB 867 and HJR 865 by Rep. Rodrigues (R).

PSC Reform - SB 170 by Sen. Legg (R) and HB 199 by Rep. Sprowls (R) would require each PSC Commissioner to be appointed to a specific district and to reside in that district.

FMPA PSC Regulation - HB 773 by Rep. Mayfield (D) would amend the definition of "public utility" to include certain entities created under the Florida Interlocal Cooperation Act of 1969, which is the Act that created FMPA.

Cost Recovery for Nuclear/IGCC Power Plants - HB 67 by Rep. Murphy (D), HB 4001 by Rep. Rehwinkle-Vasilinda (D), and HB 473 by Rep. Ahern (R) would repeal the pre-completion cost recovery clause that is available to IOUs to finance construction of nuclear and IGCC power plants and HB 353 by Rep. Burgess (R) would limit the recovery to one plant at a time.

Indian River Co./City of Vero Beach - SB 442 by Sen. Altman (R) and HB 337 by Rep. Mayfield (R) would allow a county to provide services and facilities to customers in unincorporated areas currently served by a municipality after a franchise or other consent agreement expires.

Drone Surveillance - HB 979 by Rep. Smith would create the Florida Drone Privacy Act, which would require the Dept. of Law Enforcement (FDLE) to adopt guidelines for the use of drones by state or local law enforcement agencies.

Renewable Energy – HB 1227 by Rep. Rehwinkel-Vasilinda (D) would exempt entities that exclusively produce or sell renewable energy from the definition of a “public utility” under Chapter 366. The bill would revise the legislative intent of the renewable energy law and would find that renewable energy should be promoted.

Rebates for Solar Installations - SB 868 by Sen. Soto (D) and HB 1089 by Rep. Torres (D) and SB 992 by Sen. Bullard would revive the defunct Solar Energy System Incentives Program for purchases of solar photovoltaic, solar hot water heaters, and solar pool heating systems between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2020.

Federal Funding of Nuclear Plants - HB 1267 by Rep. Rehwinkle-Vasilinda (D) is a House Memorial urging Congress to stop funding the federal loan guarantee program for new nuclear plants and to rescind any remaining funds in the program.

Electromagnetic Pulse/Geomagnetic Storms - HB 1251 by Rep. Rehwinkle-Vasilinda (D) is a Memorial that would urge Congress to direct the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security to prepare for EMPs and geomagnetic storms.

Safe Work Environment – SB 892 by Sen. Bullard (D) and HB 297 by Rep. Campbell (D) would create the Safe Work Environment Act to provide legal relief

for employees who have been harmed by being deliberately subjected to abusive work environments.

Ratification of State Implementation Plan - HB 849 by Rep. Wood (R) and SB 1076 by Sen. Gibson (D) would require legislative ratification for a state implementation plan (SIP) pursuant to EPA's proposed 111(d) rule on existing power plants. HB 849 passed out of its first committee. However, the sponsors have determined that this legislation may be premature and for the time being will not continue to push the bill.

Labor Regulations - SB 890 by Sen. Bullard would have created the Florida Overtime Act of 2015.

PSC Ethics Reform/Banning Cost Recovery for Fracking - HB 399 by Rep. Dudley (D) would subject more PSC proceedings to the prohibition against ex parte communications and would prohibit IOUs from recovering costs associated with the exploration for oil or natural gas.