Thanks for asking about the Solar Constitutional Amendment

We have been bombarded with calls about the solar amendment, and we are delighted because we want everyone to understand it before they vote. The most common question is which story about Amendment 1 is correct - is it great or pure evil? I’ll give you a hint, those in favor of Amendment 1 want you to read it and the attackers want you to only read their misinformation. Please ignore the hype and read the short Amendment and Ballot Summary.

The not-for-profit electric co-ops weren’t involved in drafting Amendment 1, but we support it. Amendment 1 will prevent solar companies from bypassing fundamental safety regulations and consumer fraud protections. Bypassing safety regulations would place our employees, first responders, and you at risk. Also, fraud is too common in the rooftop solar business, and the government needs to have powers to protect us from bad actors. Google “Arizona solar scam” and you will see some of their schemes.

You probably are asking why the existing laws won’t suffice. In short, we need Amendment 1 to make sure these protections can’t disappear. A Tennessee corporation plans to amend Florida’s Constitution in 2018 to “promote” solar by undermining safety and consumer protection laws. That amendment would allow solar companies to bypass “reasonable health, safety, and welfare regulations” specifically including “building codes, electrical codes, safety codes and pollution control regulations.” It also could require customers that don’t own solar to pay higher electric bills to cover the utility’s cost of providing backup power to customers that own solar. Solar owners are wealthy and their solar is heavily subsidized by federal tax credits and state and local government tax breaks. One study shows that salaries of solar owners in Florida average more than $100,000 per year and they own a home worth more than $350,000. Do solar owners really need an additional subsidy from low and fixed income electric customers that already are struggling to pay their electric bill?

Amendment 1 will stop the nonsense by:

1. **Allowing governments to continue to maintain reasonable health, safety, and consumer protections for solar generation.** Firefighters and not-for-profit electric co-ops support Amendment 1 because it guarantees that reasonable solar safety regulations can’t be undermined by special interest groups.

2. **Ensuring that low-income utility customers and others do not have to pay higher electric bills to subsidize their neighbor’s solar panels.**  Contrary to what you may have heard, this provision will not, and cannot, affect the federal law that requires utilities to purchase their customers’ excess solar power.

3. **Cementing into Florida’s Constitution everyone’s right to own and use solar.**

Thanks for reading and please vote.

Bill Willingham is the Executive Vice-President of the Florida Electric cooperatives Association, which represents 17 of Florida’s not-for-profit electric cooperatives.