Rich Blaser: Electricity choice would transform Florida for the better

**By Rich Blaser / Special to The Sun**

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With most of our expenses, we have a choice. If our car insurance is too high, we shop around for a new plan. If a cell phone carrier offers a deal too good to pass up, we switch to a new company. If we don’t like the service we receive at a local store, we start shopping somewhere else.

But while electricity bills can be a significant expense for Florida homes and businesses alike, it’s one of the few expenses we can’t control. Rates can vary a lot across the state, and how much we like the service we get is just the luck of the draw depending on the utility we’re assigned.

However, there’s an amendment before the Florida Constitution Revision Commission that could change all that. Proposal 51 would give us Floridians the right to choose our own electricity providers.

While our existing utilities would continue to own and manage the lines, read meters and respond to outages, we would have competition for the cost of the electricity itself.

Thirty U.S. states have some form of energy choice. Some have done it well, some have done it not so well, but all have taught us a lot about what a properly structured market should look like.

There are three main benefits that customers get from competitive energy markets:

• **Lower prices:** Of course cost is most people’s primary concern, and competition usually results in savings of about 10 to 20 percent. In Florida, this would translate into $2.5 billion to $5 billion saved every year.

Because competition gives us more options, we can afford to customize our service. Right now in Texas, you could get an electricity plan that is 100 percent green energy, and it would still cost less than the lowest residential rate in Florida.

And we get to choose our own plans, so we can pick the rate we want, how long to lock it in and whether we want to support certain energy sources such as renewable products. Choice puts control back in consumer’s hands.

• **More innovation:** With competition, we consumers vote with our wallets, and that gives suppliers incentive to offer new and exciting products.

Different suppliers can offer rate plans designed for certain usage patterns, so we could set up plans that reward the way we use electricity. Right now, we’re all just billed the same way as other customers in our basic usage class, even though we don’t use electricity the same way.

And electricity choice gives options for innovations in infrastructure as well. For example, some markets have smart meters, which means service can be turned off or on in just a couple of hours. It also allows customers to monitor their usage themselves to make sure their bills stay on track.

• **Better customer service:** When consumers have the ability to switch away, suppliers are driven to try to keep their business.

Certainly this can mean longer customer service hours and lower wait times, but it also means incentives to try to continue earning customers’ business. Just as you may receive certain perks from a cell phone company or cable provider when you sign up for new service, you can get the same from your electricity supplier.

Typically, suppliers in markets with energy choice have higher Google ratings than their non-competitive counterparts. Complaint rates tend to be lower as well.

And these benefits aren’t restricted to the energy industry — we’ve already seen them in action when choice opened up in the telecom industry or even the taxi industry through Uber and Lyft.

We’ve also already seen it in Florida. Some commercial and industrial customers have a choice for natural gas supply. They’ve saved billions of dollars since that option opened in 1996, and having the same choice for electricity can do even more.

Electricity choice has the power to transform Florida for the better. We’ve seen huge positive benefits in other markets, and Florida deserves the same.

*Rich Blaser is a founder of Florida Energy Freedom and co-CEO at Infinite Energy. You can learn more about the initiative for electricity choice at* [*www.floridaenergyfreedom.org*](http://www.floridaenergyfreedom.org/)

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