

FECA Florida Legislative Report

February 14, 2013

The bills that are of concern to co-ops are listed below. More information on each bill can be found by visiting either www.myfloridahouse.gov or www.flsenate.gov.

New Bills

Regulation of Municipal Electric Utilities – HB 733 by Rep. Mayfield would provide that every municipality that sells electricity, gas, or water/wastewater outside of its incorporated limits is subject to full regulation by the Public Service Commission.

Campaign Finance Reform – HB 569 by Rep. Schenck would eliminate Committees of Continuous Existence (CCEs) and all associated reporting requirements. The bill would allow unlimited contributions to a Political Committee (PC) and the PC would be allowed to contribute up to \$10,000 to a candidate per election. The bill would increase reporting requirements for candidates, PCs and others. In addition, the bill would change certain campaign contribution limits including: 1) For candidates - increases the limit to \$10,000/election (up from \$500/election) from any one person or PC; and 2) For PCs - allows unlimited contributions (up from \$500/election). Candidates would be allowed to retain up to \$100,000 in their campaign account for use in the candidate's next campaign for the same office.

Federal Funding of Nuclear Plants - HB 567 by Rep. Vasilinda 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. Additionally, the Memorial urges Congress to eliminate funding for mixed oxide plutonium fuel plants; to support energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy; to increase funding for environmental cleanup programs; and to fund nuclear waste immobilization. The Memorial also would urge the U.S. Dept. of Energy to comply with all cleanup and legacy management agreements.

Termination of Service Prohibition - HB 749 by Rep. Lee and SB 508 by Sen. Thompson would prevent an electric or gas utility from disconnecting service, because of nonpayment, to seniors or low-income families during extreme weather days (40°F or below or 90°F and above). The bill would not allow disconnections on the day or the following two days (also any day before a holiday or weekend) when the temperature standards are met. The bill does not define “senior citizen” or “low income”.

Assault or Battery on Utility Workers - SB 344 by Sen. Soto and HB 511 by Rep. Fullwood would increase the criminal penalties for committing assault or battery on a utility worker.

Elected PSC – HB 447 by Rep. Dudley would require PSC commissioners to be elected rather than appointed. Candidates would not be able to raise campaign funds from any entity regulated by the PSC. Additionally, it would require the PSC to consult with the Public Counsel before ruling on any rate changes for a regulated entity.

Public Records – SB 714 by Sen. Simmons and HB 649 by Rep. Cummings would exempt from the public records laws any proprietary confidential business information of a private or out-of-state entity that submits a bid for a utility project to a municipal electric utility. Utility projects include improving delivery or diversification of fuel or renewable energy.

Tangible Personal Property - HB 505 by Rep. Vasilinda would allow counties to impose a discretionary sales surtax on the entire sale of tangible personal property. Currently, there is a \$5,000 cap on which the surtax can apply. This bill would remove the cap on electricity sales and everything else except sales involving a motor vehicle, aircraft, boat, manufactured home, modular home, or mobile home.

Economic Development Zones - SB 192 by Sen. Legg and HB 299 by Rep. Grant would allow the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to create economic

development zones relating to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in counties that have state universities that specialize in research. Counties that have a qualifying research institution must apply to the DEO to receive STEM zone designation. The DEO would develop a high-tech grant program for STEM zones to solicit competitive applications to entities that propose groundbreaking ideas. The total amount of state credits, refunds, and exemptions that may be provided by the county of each STEM zone is \$300,000 per year.

Economic Development Programs Evaluation - SB 406 by Senator Gardiner and HB 641 by Rep. Rodriguez would require the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (OEDR) and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to develop an Economic Development Programs Evaluation report, which would provide an analysis of certain economic development programs and determine each program's economic benefit to the state. The OEDR would review and evaluate each economic development incentive application for the economic benefit of the proposed award of state incentives for each project. SB 406 passed out of its first committee.

Enterprise Zones - SB 480 by Sen. Stargel and HB 221 by Rep. Albritton would allow the Cities of Auburndale, Bartow, Eagle Lake, Fort Meade, Frostproof, Lake Wales, Mulberry, and Polk City to individually or jointly apply for enterprise zone designation. Only eight designations would be allowed and the Dept. of Economic Opportunity would administer the program.

Workers' Compensation - SB 662 by Sen. Hays and HB 605 by Rep. Hudson would address a loophole in the workers' compensation system that allows physicians to dispense repackaged drugs and charge employers drug prices that greatly exceed the statutory reimbursement for the same medications dispensed by pharmacies. If the bill passes, it should reduce workers' compensation rates.

Natural Gas for Vehicles - SB 560 by Sen. Simpson and HB 579 by Rep. Ray would establish standards for the distribution, sale, and taxation of natural gas that will

essentially mirror regulations for diesel fuel. Currently, Florida law treats natural gas as an alternative fuel with a unique licensing structure and system of fees and taxes. Further, the legislation would establish a rebate program for purchases of natural gas vehicles. Additionally, local governments would be allowed to use up to 15% of the local surtax to fund installations of natural gas systems.

Water Quality Trading Credits – HB 713 by Rep. Pigman and SB 754 by Sen. Grimsley would allow water quality trading programs to be established throughout Florida, building on a pilot program in the lower St. John River basin. The water quality credit trading would be a voluntary, market based approach to promote water protection and restoration. The trading would allow pollutant reductions to be environmentally valued in the form of credits, which could be traded on a local market.

Priority Bills

Electricity Theft - SB 338 by Sen. Simpson and HB 191 by Rep. Raulerson would increase penalties for stealing electricity. Currently, the criminal penalty is a first-degree misdemeanor, regardless of the dollar value of the electricity that is stolen. The legislation would allow penalties that vary depending upon the value of the electricity that was stolen. Additionally, the legislation would increase the minimum award in a civil action against the thief from \$1,000 to \$3,000, which would mitigate the utility's time and cost of recovering its losses. Both bills passed out of their first referenced committee.

Coal Combustion Residuals (CCRs) - SB 682 by Sen. Simpson and HB 659 by Rep. Goodson would address a proposed rule by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that could regulate CCRs as hazardous waste. Currently, CCRs in Florida are recycled for use in cement, wallboard, materials for roads, and other uses, or stored in landfills. However, Florida law prohibits storage of hazardous material in landfills, and EPA's rule could require CCRs to be shipped out of Florida for storage costing Seminole more than \$100 million per year. Additionally, EPA's rule could prevent electric utilities from recycling CCRs. This bill would exempt CCRs from Florida's laws that prohibit the storage of hazardous waste in landfills,

allowing CCRs to continue to be landfilled in Florida even if EPA adopts the rule. The bill also would make it easier to recycle CCRs if EPA does not adopt the rule, and hopefully would make it possible for electric utilities to continue recycling CCRs in Florida if EPA adopts the rule.

Retail Wheeling for Renewable Generators - SB 498 by Sen. Thompson and HB 309 by Rep. Rehwinkle-Vasilinda would exempt renewable energy systems of up to 5 MW from the definition of public utility. These generators would not be regulated by the PSC and could sell electricity to existing utility customers (it is silent as to whether they must be customers of the same utility) that are on property adjacent to, contiguous with, or located within a half mile of the generator. The bill is silent as to whether we can put these customers on a special rate to insure that the remaining customers do not subsidize the renewable generator's consumers. Additionally, the bill would require public utilities to purchase the renewable energy at the same rate they sell energy to ratepayers, instead of at avoided cost.

Other Bills of Interest

Ban Texting While Driving - SB 52 by Sen. Detert and HB 13 by Rep. Holder would ban typing messages on electronic devices while operating a vehicle. The bill would not prevent the safe usage of mobile or radio devices for verbal communication. The penalty would be a secondary offense meaning that law enforcement could not stop a motorist just for texting while driving. SB 74 by Sen. Sachs would make the violation a primary offense, meaning law enforcement could ticket a violator just for texting while driving. Additionally, HB 61 and SB 152 would ban the use of all mobile electronic devices for minors who are driving. SB 708 by Sen. Soto would elevate accidents causing deaths to vehicular homicide if the driver was texting while driving. SB 52 passed out of its first committee.

Cost Recovery - HB 4003 by Rep. Rehwinkle-Vasilinda would repeal the pre-completion cost recovery clause that is available to IOUs to finance construction of nuclear and IGCC facilities.

Ad Valorem Exemptions - HB 277 by Rep. Rehwinkle-Vasilinda would implement a Constitutional amendment that passed in 2008, which prohibits the taxation of improvements to residential property if the improvements are a renewable energy device or they strengthen the property's resistance to wind damage. The exemptions would only apply to work done on or after January 1, 2013.

Repeal of Renewable Gasoline Standard - SB 320 by Sen. Evers and HB 4001 by Rep. Gaetz would repeal the Florida Renewable Fuel Standard Act that was enacted in 2008 (HB 7135). The Act requires that all gas sold after 2010, with exceptions, must contain 9-10% fuel ethanol.

Office of Homelessness - SB 402 by Sen. Joyner and HB 93 by Rep. Reed would create the Office of Homelessness within the Dept. of Children and Families. The Office would have funds that could be used to help families pay bills including past due utility costs. HB 93 passed out of its first committee.