



## **Solar Energy Powering Florida's Future**

### ***Charlie Crist's Plan for a Thriving Solar Energy Industry in Florida***

Florida has the potential to lead a new era of economic prosperity built upon sustainable, renewable energy. Our state is blessed with plenty of sunshine, providing us with an inexhaustible source of clean, cheap energy right here at home. Governor Crist wants to develop clean, renewable resources to make power more affordable for Floridians.

Our state has some of the nation's greatest potential for solar energy, but today less than one half percent of our electricity comes from solar energy. This is largely due to Florida's restrictive laws that inhibit solar investment. As Governor, Charlie will unlock the solar market in the Sunshine State, growing the solar industry, creating jobs, and helping Floridians save money on their energy bills.

During his first term as Governor, Charlie Crist was a nationally-recognized leader in promoting renewable energy:

- **Few states had a more aggressive effort to address global warming and promote renewable energy than Florida under Gov. Charlie Crist.** According to the *Lakeland Ledger*, "Few states had a more aggressive Republican-backed effort to address global warming and promote renewable energy than Florida in 2007 and 2008. But the political mood has changed so dramatically that lawmakers today are close to repealing the period's signature energy initiative. Appealing to environmental concerns and global expectations that renewable electricity would be the next boom industry, former Gov. Charlie Crist made energy reform a top priority after his 2006 election."<sup>1</sup>
- **Gov. Crist pushed through major renewable energy and conservation legislation.** In 2008, Gov. Crist pushed through the legislature a 237-page bill that promoted solar power, ethanol, energy efficient buildings and other many other reforms.<sup>2</sup> Among other proposals, the bill created the Florida Energy and Climate Commission, established new goals for low carbon electricity generation, and reauthorized an *ad valorem* tax exemption for renewable energy source devices.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Rick Scott is beholden to big monopoly utilities that give millions of dollars to his campaign.<sup>4</sup> He's also buckled under pressure from the Tea Party, dismantling the progress made during Gov. Crist's term and vetoing investments in renewable energy for Florida:

- **Rick Scott dismantled the Energy and Climate Commission that was created by Gov. Charlie Crist.** According to the *Tampa Bay Times*, "The Legislature in July dismantled the Energy and Climate Commission, a Crist creation housed within the office of Gov. Rick Scott, and transferred its responsibilities to Putnam's agency, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services."<sup>5</sup>
- **Rick Scott vetoed \$7.5 million for the innovation hub science/energy complex at Florida Gulf Coast University.** In 2013 WGPU reported that "Scott and the Florida Legislature awarded FGCU \$4.9 million last year to plan what the school calls its 'Innovation Hub.' The 'I-Hub' is aimed at fostering research and creating internships for students in the renewable energy sector in Southwest Florida. The school broke ground on the project last year, but now FGCU's President, Wilson Bradshaw, said it will be hard to move the project forward because of Governor Scott's line item veto of the funding. The \$7.5 million was supposed to go to FGCU for developing the I-Hub."<sup>6</sup>
- In 2013 the *Tallahassee Democrat's* editorial board stated that, "As for Gov. Scott, he eliminated the Energy and Climate Commission, moved the Office of Energy to the Department of Agriculture and **has made no effort to support renewable energy policy in Florida.**"<sup>7</sup>

## **Freeing up the solar energy market in Florida will lead to lower electric bills and more jobs.**

Throughout the country, Americans are increasingly using solar energy to save money on their utility bills. Capacity in the United States has tripled just since 2010 and installation costs have gone down 37 per cent.<sup>8,9</sup> As the Sunshine State, Florida has more than 300 days of sunshine a year, but other states are outpacing Florida in the adoption of solar technology.<sup>10</sup> Rick Scott has sided with big power companies over consumers and has failed to see the economic and job creation benefits of promoting solar energy in Florida. Charlie Crist, however, is committed to making Florida a leader in clean energy.

**"While Florida advertises itself as the Sunshine State, power company executives and regulators have worked successfully to keep most Floridians from using that sunshine to generate their own power."**

[*Los Angeles Times*, [8/9/14](#)]

As Governor, Charlie will remove the artificial barriers that have stifled entrepreneurship and caused Florida to send money out of state for dirtier fuel. By freeing up Florida's solar market, Charlie will help consumers save money on their utility bills, create high-paying jobs, increase investments, and generate income for our state.

Specifically, Gov. Crist will work to:

**1. Stop regulating solar providers as utilities and allow for power purchase agreements**

In addition to leases, power purchase agreements are another form of third-party financing for solar energy systems. This model allows a vendor to build a solar energy system on a customer's property at no cost.<sup>11</sup> The customer then pays a specific rate for the electricity generated by the solar system each month.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the contract term, the customer can extend the contract or buy the system. Florida law claims that selling electricity makes the solar developers a utility, but this is a burdensome regulation designed to keep out competition. As Governor, Charlie Crist will work to change Florida law so that regulations for solar will be fair.

**2. Provide low-cost financing and other incentives**

State and local governments can facilitate the financing of solar systems through consumers' tax bills in what's known as 'property assessed clean energy', or PACE financing. With this approach, investors or local governments cover the up-front costs of qualified energy improvements like efficiency and solar. They are repaid over a period of years through a voluntary special assessment on the property tax of the individual business or homeowner. The debt is secured by a lien on the property. Charlie Crist will work to facilitate the availability of this program for solar system purchase and installation in all of our local government jurisdictions.

Charlie will also promote the development of performance-based incentives that provide rebates based on the actual energy production of the solar system. These require system metering and are usually paid on a kilowatt hour basis over a period of time. Not only do they serve to assist businesses and homeowners with the purchase of a solar energy system, but they also encourage energy efficiency by tying the rebates to energy production. These incentives reward high-performing systems.

**3. Pay businesses and homeowners fair rates for the excess power they generate (a state policy of net metering)**

If customers with solar systems generate more energy than they consume, utilities currently do not buy that energy at a fair market rate. This artificially hinders the cost-effectiveness of solar energy systems, which typically produce less energy than is needed at certain times and more energy than is needed at other times. 'Net metering' refers to the practice of a utility charging customers only for electricity that is consumed off the grid over and above what the solar system provides, and paying the customer for any electricity that the solar system contributes to the grid. As Governor, Charlie Crist will fight to maintain and extend net metering to all solar system operations.

**4. Provide an *ad valorem* tax exemption for businesses that install renewable energy devices, including solar panels, when the company consumes the electricity it generates**

Charlie Crist will work to allow businesses who buy solar equipment with the same type of tax exemption the law already provides to homeowners. Charlie believes our business community deserves the same renewable energy exemptions homeowners enjoy.

**5. Provide for streamlined permitting and interconnection standards for solar statewide**

Interconnection standards are requirements for connecting solar and other electrical generation systems to the grid. It is important to keep the interconnection and permitting process from being an impediment to bringing solar systems online. Charlie Crist will work to ensure that interconnection standards are streamlined and cost effective, allowing for timely connection to the grid and assuring safety and reliability.

Charlie Crist, as Governor, will work with the Florida Public Service Commission and other policymakers to do the same in Florida.

**6. Fulfill the promises made by Florida's Solar Rebate Program**

During Governor Crist's first term in office, legislation was passed that provided a rebate to homeowners who purchased and installed a solar energy system. The program received an overwhelming number of applications. Even though many residents benefitted from the program and received rebates, in 2010 legislative leaders refused to provide the funding to meet the state's obligation to everyone who, in good faith, purchased solar systems and applied for the rebate.<sup>13,14</sup> This was a promise made to Floridians and, even though several years have come and gone, Charlie believes we should honor our commitment and pay these citizens what they are owed.

**"There are no plans right now to refund the remaining 11,000 consumers the full rebate they were promised."**

[Katie LaGrone, reporter for WPTV Channel 5, [2/4/2013](#)]

In summary, Charlie Crist believes solar power is vital to the economic prosperity of Florida. He knows harnessing this God-given energy resource will save Floridians money while attracting industry and creating jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theledger.com/article/20120304/NEWS/120309775>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theledger.com/article/20120304/NEWS/120309775>

<sup>3</sup> HB 7135 Staff Analysis.

<http://myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?FileName=h7135.ENRC.doc&DocumentType=Analysis&BillNumber=7135&Session=2008>. Retrieved 9/8/14.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters. 9/2/14. <http://www.trust.org/item/20140901120038-x91ua>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tampabay.com/news/business/energy/agriculture-commissioner-adam-putnam-treads-carefully-with-new-energy/1210917>

<sup>6</sup> "Gov. Scott Vetoes Funding For FGCU's Renewable Energy Institute", *WGCU.org*.

<http://news.wgcu.org/post/gov-scott-vetoes-funding-fgcus-renewable-energy-institute>

<sup>7</sup> *Tallahassee Democrat*, Op-Ed, 05/28/13

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/07/25/states-take-a-shine-to-alternate-energy/2588009/>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.novoco.com/journal/2014/05/news\\_retc\\_201405.php](http://www.novoco.com/journal/2014/05/news_retc_201405.php)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.environmentflorida.org/programs/file/repower-florida-clean-energy>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.seia.org/policy/finance-tax/third-party-financing>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.seia.org/policy/finance-tax/third-party-financing>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.wptv.com/news/local-news/investigations/state-reneges-on-solar-rebate-promise>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoH5-9kkvZU>