

Bill awaiting DeSantis' OK would end years of renewable energy policies

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A bill sitting on Gov. Ron DeSantis' desk would end the state's support

of renewable and clean energy and keep Florida reliant on fossil fuels, critics say.

If signed, the law would reverse 16 years of state policy, finishing the work started by former Gov. Rick Scott and undoing Gov. Charlie Crist's signature piece of environmental legislation.

Most troubling to environmentalists, it would eliminate any mention of climate change, even though mostly flat Florida is extremely vulnerable to [global warming](#), as already seen with rising waters in the Keys, Miami Beach and Tampa Bay.

The [bill](#) (HB 1645) would ban offshore wind power while encouraging exploring emerging technologies in [nuclear energy](#), a frightening prospect to those who remember nuclear plants at Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and Crystal River.

"I think it really forces us to back away from the progress we've been trying to make," said state Rep. Lindsay Cross, D-St. Petersburg, an environmental scientist.

For example, she said, the state has invested more than \$1.6 billion in Florida climate resiliency grants, encouraging "[local governments](#) to be more prepared, but in the same breath saying they don't believe in climate change."

And it signals that state officials will no longer encourage using alternative and renewable energy sources, she said.

The measure would repeal a law Crist enacted in 2008 as a Republican that launched efforts to battle climate change and back renewable energy. It had the support of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Republican governor of California.

After coming into office in 2011, Scott, now a U.S. senator, gutted much of what Crist got enacted. This year's bill repeals what's left of it. It passed the Legislature earlier this year with Republican support and Democratic opposition.

The bill was sent to DeSantis on Friday, and he has until May 15 to take action.

DeSantis "will review the legislation in the coming days," spokeswoman Julia Friedland said in an email when asked if he had a position on the measure.

Cross said it was commendable that the administration has invested billions of dollars in Everglades recovery and to battle red tide, but she said those actions were in response to problems that have been around for decades.

"They do a poor job coming up with strategies now and to plan for ... pressing issues," she said.

Florida is not an energy producer. The state relies on oil, natural gas and gasoline coming in by rail, pipeline, ships and tankers.

Bill sponsor Rep. Bobby Payne, a former utility executive and Republican from Palatka, said the bill protects Florida's energy consumers and lowers prices.

"We're protecting them with great reliability and we're protecting them to make sure we don't have a lack of energy security in our state," Payne said.

The Crist-era law made it less flexible for the state to meet its energy needs, he said.

David Cullen, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club Florida, said during a committee hearing that "the bill is designed to eliminate any competition to fossil fuels and to maintain Florida's dependence on [fossil fuels](#) for its energy."

Payne's bill goes beyond eliminating mentions of climate change and banning offshore wind turbines, which critics worry could ruin beach views for tourists.

It would end several programs promoting green or renewable energy, including the Florida Energy and Climate Protection Act, the Renewable Energy and Energy-Efficient Technologies Grants Program, the Florida Green Government Grants Act and the Energy Economic Zone.

It also would ban governments from booking meetings at hotels and buildings certified as "green lodging." And it would eliminate a requirement that state agencies, public universities and local governments lease hybrid and electric vehicles.

Local governments would be prohibited from blocking the construction of "resiliency centers," which are giant fuel reservoirs established for emergency use.

The bulk of the bill seems targeted toward DeSantis' ongoing culture wars and battles with "the global elite," Cross said.

Cross noted that DeSantis signed another bill that preempts local governments from regulating charging stations, and the state Department of Environmental Protection has granted permission to explore for oil in the Apalachicola River basin in the Panhandle.

She said the state has no interest in energy alternatives.

"Don't we know better than this?" she asked. "We are constantly fighting technology we don't like. It's the same story over and over."

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