



# ENERGY NEWS

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## Integrating Florida's energy efforts for a sustainable future

by Robert Farmer, © 2000

I can think of no other time in history when energy and energy-related environmental issues were more pressing than they are today. What's most worrisome is that unless they're solved with dispatch, these issues threaten to define 21<sup>st</sup> century living conditions in ways none of us want to think about. They affect everyone on the planet.

At the international level, the global community is trying to finalize a regime to battle greenhouse gases. I don't believe that this week's election of a new President and Congress will help much. Whoever the choice, Al Gore or George W. Bush, neither of them will be able to deliver a binding U.S. commitment to deal with greenhouse gas emissions to the satisfaction of the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (CoP-6) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in The Hague the week following the elections. At that meeting the European Union will be attempting to bring the protocol into ratification, with or without the participation of the Americans. The Europeans are being driven by the frequency of extreme weather events which in their relatively small countries are national disasters. The anecdotal evidence for global warming is clear enough to them. Floods are raking their economies, it rains where once it snowed, and centuries old glaciers are disappearing before their eyes. Their angst is everywhere

and it's turning to anger as they see the United States, the world's largest emitter, ignore their pleas for a binding commitment to deal with this problem.

The U.S. may be concerned that the costs of the Kyoto Protocol are too high, but would the American economy still be immune if Europe suffered terrible economic collapse brought about by global warming, or, more ominously, if they were to seek economic retribution against the U.S. for its intransigence? Of course it's easy to dismiss the Europeans as not understanding that economics drives politics in the U.S., not the other way round as it is in their countries, but do you think they really care when their very way of life is threatened?

While the Europeans have their problems, the U.S. has its own. It's wrong for the Europeans to think that America is sitting aloof. The truth is that it's not possible for the U.S. to switch from its fossil fuel diet anytime soon. We consume and need fossil fuels more than any other nation on Earth. With only 4% of the world's population and 25% of its fossil fuel consumption, our problems of transition to cleaner technologies are much greater than the Europeans can imagine. And in our non-regulatory voluntary way of doing things, we have to trust that energy consumers will make the right choices once they miraculously discover the benefits of energy efficiency. Meanwhile we'll scour the hemisphere for more diverse sources of methane for

our combined-cycle power plants, and gasoline for our hybrid-electric cars. With this national plan we will mitigate the rate of growth of additional emissions somewhat, but our current emissions will continue unabated.

So, with little meaningful leadership from Washington, the states are left to implement the regional future upon which they, the nation, and the global community will depend. Washington provides regulatory frameworks, voluntary programs, and funds to help develop additional fossil resources and incrementally cleaner technologies. But without a national sustainable energy plan to guide them, the states are left to their own devices to conjure up the solutions to sustainability. It's not a fair task.

You only have to look at Florida's efforts to get a feel for the scope of the problem. Here, at the regional level for the U.S., there are several concurrent activities taking place related to solving energy issues. And ultimately if the states are solving the problems in lieu of leadership from the nation's capital, then it can be said that Europe's fate is in the hands of the states.

How is Florida doing? As well as can be expected. As many as five distinct and separate commissions and task forces have energy issues at the core of their deliberations. The Governor has created the *Energy 2020 Study Commission* to make recommendations on an electricity plan and strategy, which hopefully will include a renewable

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portfolio standard and cogeneration initiatives. The *Growth Management Study Commission*, among other things, is addressing transportation infrastructure and urban revitalization. The Legislature has created the *Clean Fuel Florida Advisory Board* to make recommendations on how to best increase the use of alternatively fueled vehicles in Florida. It has also created the *State Tax Reform Task Force*, which should address the tax implications of electricity deregulation and alternative fuels, to bring about a form of environmental tax-shifting. Lastly, Lt. Governor Frank Brogan chairs the *Governor's Space Task Force*, charged with keeping NASA's business in Florida. As part of those activities the state hosted a three-day *Hydrogen Summit—Planning the Bridge to Florida's Future*—in Tallahassee recently. Among other priorities, the objectives were to provide a forum for discussion of Florida's hydrogen energy future, and to craft a plan for Florida's future with regard to hydrogen applications, research and industry development. This is the realm of integrated electricity/transportation applications, of

distributed generation, fuel cells, and zero emission technologies. Hydrogen is the one energy carrier that holds the promise of bringing all the elements of an energy plan together under one roof. Florida is off to a good start, most of the pieces are in place to do a complete job, and all we need now is a study with recommendations for a consumer efficiency and conservation program and, most importantly, a plan to integrate all these activities.

If our common future lies with the efforts of the states to craft meaningful, sustainable energy policy then it is equally important that it is done in an integrated fashion. A sound electricity infrastructure is for naught if our economy goes belly up because of burgeoning prices for oil in the transportation sector. And vice versa. You know the old adage—the system is only as good as its weakest link. So come on Florida legislators, put the finishing touches on the job you've started by addressing end-use efficiency and by putting some real coordination into these efforts that will impact everyone's well being for generations to come. •



Robert Farmer is an energy planning engineer and energy policy specialist. A comprehensive resource on technologies, issues, and policies, he offers clients strategies, briefings, and presentations on planning a sustainable energy future.

His technical expertise includes large scale to small scale power generation, combined heat and power (CHP), marine and surface transportation, and alternative fuel applications.

A Florida resident since 1984, Robert was a member of the Energy Advisory Committee of Governor Chiles' Commission for a Sustainable South Florida.

He is a Regional member and Market Development Chair of the Gold Coast Clean Cities Coalition (a U.S. Department of Energy program), and a member of the Southeast Air Coalition for Outreach (SEACO, an initiative of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection).

He is a member of the international Association of Energy Engineers (AEE) and since 1992 has served on the Board of the Southeast Florida Society of Energy Professionals, the local AEE chapter. He is a member of the Sound Science Initiative of the Union of Concerned Scientists, and a member of the United States Association for Energy Economics (USAEE).

He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Tallahassee-based law firm, Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation, Inc. (LEAF), and of Third Planet, a Fort Lauderdale-based public charity.

He graduated as a Planning Engineer with Bristol-Siddeley Engines/Rolls Royce Gas Turbines Ltd. in the United Kingdom and has over 30 years engineering, sales and service management experience in the engine power industry in North America.

robertfarmer@conceptcommuniques.com  
CONCEPT COMMUNIQUE'S INC.  
5200 N Federal Hwy Ste 2  
Fort Lauderdale FL 33308  
(954) 493-8127

[www.conceptcommuniques.com](http://www.conceptcommuniques.com)