

PACE Energy Bill Passes But Renewable Energy Bill Fails

A bill that supporters said would establish an innovative renewable energy program in Florida passed the Legislature, but another bill that would have encouraged utilities to buy more renewable energy failed.

HB 7179 would establish the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program to allow local governments to finance renewable energy and storm-resistance improvements. There are 16 states with such PACE programs, according to Vote Solar. HB 7179 was the last bill to pass the House before it adjourned at 6:59 p.m. "I think this is going to attract capital to the state of Florida and I think it will create jobs in the energy efficiencies and solar technology industries," said Rep. Adam Hasner, R-Delray Beach and the House majority leader.

HB 7229, which had support from renewable and solar energy producers, wasn't taken up by the Senate. The bill would have allowed utilities to recover up to \$380 million from customers for renewable energy projects. Supporters cited a study earlier this month that said the bill could produce more than 40,000 jobs in Florida's renewable energy sector.

Sen. Mike Bennett, R-Bradenton, offered amendments to the PACE bill to include renewable energy legislation similar to the House bill. But he withdrew the amendments to prevent the bill from running into opposition as the session was winding down. Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, withdrew his amendment to revoke a state law that allows utilities to charge customers in advance for new nuclear power plants.

"One more time we are going to delay renewable energy in the state of Florida," Bennett said, citing Middle East wars and the ongoing Gulf oil spill.