

NEWS

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New Poll Shows Huge Public Support For State Programs to Promote Solar Energy

Tallahassee, Fla. – High consumer demand has exhausted the state’s solar rebate program fund six months early, and lawmakers and solar advocates today released a new survey showing Florida residents overwhelmingly support spending more money on solar energy – even if costs them a little bit more on their utility bills.

The survey of 625 registered voters (margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent), conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research Inc., shows:

- A whopping 85 percent of those polled believe the Florida Legislature should act to encourage investment in solar energy; and
- Eighty-one percent of those polled said they support that investment even if it costs \$1 extra on their monthly utility bills.

“It’s clear that the Sunshine State likes the idea of Florida becoming a solar energy leader,” said Bruce Kershner of the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association. “These landslide numbers show Sunshine State residents want to see solar taking a more important role as an energy source in their homes and businesses.”

Voters in South Florida showed the most enthusiasm, with 87 percent in favor of solar energy investment. Central Florida and the Gulf Coast were close behind, and 80 percent of those living in North Florida also favored more state investment for solar energy.

“Floridians understand the importance of having a long term strategy for harnessing energy from the sun to power our homes and businesses,” said Florida House Majority Leader Adam Hasner. “Our leadership in renewable energy technologies will create jobs in Florida, and it’s clear that ‘going green’ is good for protecting our environment and strengthening our economy.”

While voters of all ages said they supported spending more on solar energy, a stunning 93 percent of those aged between 18 and 34 agreed. Statewide, the consensus surrounding the need to promote solar energy crossed party lines, with 82 percent of Republicans favoring more public money for solar energy, compared to 87 percent of Democrats.

The poll also showed strong support for solar energy even if it led to an increase in utility bills. Overall, 81 percent of those polled said they were willing to pay \$1 more each month on their utility bill to support solar energy.

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“Germany and New Jersey are current leaders in solar energy, and one thing you can say about those places is that sunshine isn’t as plentiful there as it is in Florida,” said former Congresswoman Claudine Schneider, who serves as president of the Solar Alliance. “With its plentiful sunshine, Florida has a God-given advantage when it comes to solar energy. What’s needed is a long-term commitment from policy makers.”

Sen. Burt Saunders, R-Naples, chairs the Senate Committee on Environmental Preservation and Conservation, which is crafting legislation to promote solar energy in the state.

“We have a chance to address our growing energy needs in a cleaner, more cost-effective way that protects the environment while keeping the lights on,” Sen. Saunders said. “Of all the tools we have in our renewable energy toolbox, we know solar energy works, and that’s why so many people are enthusiastic about this technology.”

Last year, Gov. Charlie Crist and the Florida Legislature set aside \$3.5 million for the Florida Solar Energy System Incentives Program, which provides the rebates to residents and businesses on the purchase of solar equipment. Under the program:

- Solar thermal swimming pool heaters are eligible for a \$100 rebate per system.
- Residential solar water heaters are eligible for a \$500 rebate per system. Commercial solar water heating systems are eligible for a rebate of \$15 per 1,000 Btu, with a maximum rebate amount of \$5,000.
- Photovoltaic systems of 2 kilowatts or larger can qualify for a rebate based on the manufacturer’s power output rating of the system. The amount is \$4 per watt, with a residential cap of \$20,000 and a \$100,000 cap for commercial, publicly owned, or private non-profit organizations.

The first-come-first-served program has proven so popular that applicants exhausted the program’s funding after only six months. The program currently has a waiting list of more than 500 solar rebates totaling more than \$1.2 million.

To meet the incredible public demand, Gov. Crist’s \$70 billion state budget recommendation for fiscal year 2008-09 included another \$10 million for the solar rebate program.

For more information on solar energy in Florida, please visit the Florida Solar Energy Industries Association Web site at www.flaseia.org and The Vote Solar Initiative Web site at <http://www.votesolar.org/state-initiatives/florida.html>.

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