

Fight for carbon-capture coal plants Environmental protection important in Fla.

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Recently the FPL corporation quietly deposited lumps of coal in the Christmas stockings of each and every Floridian. They submitted a permit application to Florida Department of Environmental Protection seeking approval to build another coal-fired electric power plant in our state.

I received my personal lump in early October upon learning that the Glades County Economic Development Council (EDC) had been asked to endorse plans for a new FPL power plant west of Lake Okeechobee near Moore Haven. I looked into the issue and concluded there is a national-security logic to using coal, but only if we build all new coal plants so they eliminate carbon dioxide (greenhouse gas) emissions. However, my desire to so amend the endorsement resolution represented a "minority of one" viewpoint on the EDC board.

A Glades County coal plant (and the new natural gas power plant recently approved for Palm Beach County) will emit colossal amounts of CO₂ over the next 50 years. Thus, these new power plants offer Floridians a unique opportunity to make some very critical choices regarding our long-term future.

Pulverized coal plants, like the one proposed by FPL, while certainly more efficient and less polluting than older coal plants, are not well suited for carbon capture and sequestration. A more advanced design called IGCC (gasification) lends itself much better to carbon capture, as described at www.CarbonCapture.US.

Other states plan to build IGCC power plants; some will include carbon capture. TECO (Tampa Electric Company) already has an IGCC facility and recently announced plans to build two additional gasification units. If TECO sees the logic of IGCC, why can't FPL? Choosing IGCC would bring even more good jobs to Glades County and provide an even stronger long-term tax base.

But they say it's too expensive, there's no current law regulating the discharges, and technology will solve the problem in time to avoid disaster. Well, that's the same explanation corporations and government gave last decade when warned that continued inaction and half-measures on water quality would eventually lead to the destruction of our lake, river, and estuaries. So grant us our well-earned skepticism.

The public needs to motivate the Public Service Commission to require carbon capture-ready designs for all new power plants and also begin looking at retrofitting the Fort Myers natural gas power plant for carbon capture. Very importantly, we need to push for our share of the federal assistance that is helping build carbon-neutral coal power plants in California, Minnesota and other states.

What sense does it make to fund Everglades restoration or invest along our coastlines if we continue to make choices that contribute to global warming and are likely to promote flooding of these areas during the lifespan of our next generation? It is this risk and reality that is reflected in our skyrocketing homeowners insurance rates.

Florida is simply too vulnerable to the effects of climate change for us not to be among the national/global leaders in seeking and building solutions.

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