

## LWV Natural Resources Committee

### Op Ed Energy Transition from Fossil Fuel to Renewables

November 2021

The Florida and national League of Women Voters have long promoted energy conservation and renewable energy. They have advocated for a cap on greenhouse gases, lobbied for legislation, and have each declared a climate emergency. The League of Women Voters of Alachua County (LWVAC) stands on those shoulders. We are pleased that the University of Florida has stated a goal of being carbon neutral by 2025. We wonder how a planned natural gas plant can go into operation and still meet the carbon neutral goal.

Natural gas, composed largely of methane, is the product of environmentally damaging fracking to extract the gas. Pipelines, that have a record of leaking methane, transport the gas thousands of miles. For months there has been an onslaught of daily news about real-time climate crisis events, predicted events, and the need to reduce all fossil fuel emissions. The International Energy Agency has boldly stated that methane emissions must be reduced by 75% by 2030. It is unfortunate that natural gas has been marketed as clean energy. It is not. It is a significant source of methane, which is up to 87 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 20-year span.

There may be alternatives to a new fossil plant on campus. Gainesville is blessed with a rich cache of bright minds and intellectual prowess with ideas about meeting carbon neutral goals. Genuine commitment to carbon neutrality would tap into that expertise rather than settling for status quo and old technology. Rather than continuing the use of steam, perhaps new buildings could use renewable electric sources. Rather than the current large-scale steam plant, smaller units could more efficiently serve individual buildings. Rather than building a new fossil plant, continuing to purchase energy while converting to renewables could be a pivot point, a point of transition. Rather than spending millions of dollars on a new fossil energy plant, those monies could be spent on infrastructure to reduce consumption and increase solar energy production. In a few years, natural gas plants will be archaic; a product of short-term thinking.

Furthermore, while it has been purported that the gas plant will reduce UF's "carbon footprint," it is questionable that it would actually reduce overall emissions. The reduction may be an accounting nuance rather than a genuine emissions reduction, achieved by assigning emissions to the outside energy producer rather than UF. The bottom line is that a gas plant furthers use of fossil fuels rather than transitioning to sustainable energy sources.

Other universities can provide inspiration on reducing adverse impacts on the environment. Stanford is the apex achiever in sustainability. Stanford has achieved a Platinum rating in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System, in part, through reduced consumption, building efficiency and on-site renewables. Florida Gulf Coast University has sustainability as a core element of its mission, LEED buildings, and geothermal energy as a source for cooling buildings. Green Mountain College in Vermont has attained climate neutrality; it extracts as many emissions from the atmosphere as it produces.

With the cost of natural gas skyrocketing and the cost of solar arrays plummeting, increasing the dependence on gas does not make fiscal sense for any institution. As 30,000 people representing 200 countries at the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 26) are meeting to figure out how to

address the climate crisis, we all need to do our part. The LWVAC, in keeping with the long-standing League of Women Voters position on conservation and renewable energy, encourages building for the transition from fossil energy to renewable energy.

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