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January 29, 2020

Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
State of Florida
The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

RE: Transition to Clean Energy and Cost-Saving Energy Efficiency to Combat the Climate Crisis in the “Sunshine State”

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Happy New Year – 2020 provides an incredible opportunity to unleash innovative clean energy solutions in the “Sunshine State” and to commit to modern energy efficiency initiatives that save consumers money and create a state that is more resilient to the climate crisis. Together, we can build a clean energy economy that creates good-paying jobs and reduces the escalating costs to Floridians. Florida should be a leader in clean energy to boost Florida’s economy and the communities we love.

Last year, my colleagues and I wrote to highlight the grave implications for the State of Florida noted in the U.S. Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA) including greater frequency of extreme coastal and inland flooding, mosquito-borne diseases, high-intensity hurricanes, invasive species, coral reef die offs, heat-related health threats and toxic algae blooms.¹ We also highlighted the Brookings Institution report that singled out Florida as the state most at risk to economic harm from the climate crisis.² Florida is more vulnerable to significant economic damages, lost wages, mortality from extreme temperatures and coastal property damage. Increasing temperatures are responsible for economic costs related to health impacts like asthma, heat stroke and water quality-related illnesses, which are especially prevalent in communities of color who often are the first and most seriously impacted by the climate crisis.

I appreciate your creation of Florida’s first Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) and recognition of climate change in the Blue Green Algae Task Force. Resiliency efforts are only part of the equation, however, and must be combined with an ambitious transition away from greenhouse gases to clean energy. Florida cannot afford to wait any longer. Other states are well ahead in seizing the opportunities of the clean energy economy. It is not too late for the “Sunshine State”

¹ Castor, K. (2019, February 15). *U.S. Rep. Castor & Florida’s Democratic Congressional Delegation Urge Gov. DeSantis to Commit to Clean Energy Future*. Retrieved from https://castor.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2.13.19_ltr_to_gov_desantis_re_renewable_energy.pdf

² Muro, M., Victor, D.G., & Whiton, J. (2019, January 29). *How the Geography of Climate Damage Could Make the Politics Less Polarizing*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-the-geography-of-climate-damage-could-make-the-politics-less-polarizing/>

to become a clean energy leader and provide the citizens of our great state with greater choice and freedom. As a first step, Florida should set meaningful goals for clean electricity generation and energy efficiency to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save consumers money. While most other states have set targets for clean energy and efficiency, Florida has not.³ Florida lags far behind other states. While the investor-owned electric utilities (IOUs) are taking small steps on renewable projects, the state must press them to do more – much more. The parent companies of Florida Power and Light, Duke Energy and Tampa Electric are more broadly expanding clean electricity *in other states and Canada*, largely because policymakers have directed them to do so. It is time for Florida leaders to do the same.

It was heartening to see the Public Service Commission (PSC) reject the IOU monopolies' request to eliminate Florida's energy efficiency goals late last year.⁴ Now, you, Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Nikki Fried and the Legislature have an opportunity to update energy efficiency targets for Florida families, businesses and communities. Be bold! Energy efficiency saves money and would reduce carbon pollution in the most cost-effective way possible. The Southern Alliance for Clean Energy noted in a recent report that “[u]tility energy efficiency programs are key to affordable energy, especially for households suffering from high energy bills struggling with untenable tradeoffs ... [like] tough choices between food, medicine, and transportation, or paying their energy bills.”⁵ I also recommend that you reestablish a solar energy rebate program that was gutted by the PSC in 2014.

America is on the cusp of exciting transformation in the cars and trucks we drive and how we travel via transit and rail. I urge you to invest in transit, electric vehicles (EVs) and thoughtful land use policies. Florida's growing population requires modern options for traveling around our large state, and citizens are hungry for leaders to provide greater choice and flexibility to serve our workforce and the tourists our economy relies on to thrive. I encourage you to take an active role in linking growing communities, converting fleets to electric, expanding charging infrastructure and revising building codes in concert with local communities. You took a positive step in directing a portion of the Volkswagen (VW) settlement funds to EV charging infrastructure, and I urge you to invest the rest of the monies to achieve the greatest carbon reduction possible. Your new Office of Resiliency could play a thoughtful role in establishing the state-of-the-art policies of the future with nimble state agencies and a forward-thinking Department of Transportation. It is likely that Congress will pass a transportation and infrastructure package that will help to lower harmful emissions and create good-paying jobs.

Finally, Florida should be a leader in building a clean energy economy and creating economic opportunities with high quality professions and trades. Florida spent \$57 billion on energy in 2017.⁶ That is money that could be put into our local clean energy economy. Jobs are

³ *State Renewable Portfolio Standards and Goals* (2019, December 31). Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/renewable-portfolio-standards.aspx>

⁴ *PSC Maintains Higher Utility Energy Conservation Goals*. (2019, November 5). Retrieved from <http://www.psc.state.fl.us/Home/NewsLink?id=11796>

⁵ Bradley-Wright, F. & Pohnan, H. (2020, January 22). *Energy Efficiency in the Southeast 2019 Annual Report*. Retrieved from <https://cleanenergy.org/blog/energy-efficiency-in-the-southeast-2019-annual-report/>

⁶ Total End-use Energy Price and Expenditure Estimates, 1970-2017, Florida. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.eia.gov/state/seds/data.php?incfile=/state/seds/sep_prices/tx/pr_tx_FL.html&sid=FL

growing exponentially in the clean energy sector - well beyond dirty fossil fuel industries.⁷ Not only does the clean energy sector provide more jobs, but also better pay.⁸ Jobs in clean energy manufacturing, energy efficiency, smart building design and modern grids are opportunities for Florida. Our public schools, community colleges, universities and labor organizations already are educating and training the modern clean energy workforce. Businesses are clamoring for cost-saving, clean energy and green building choices, and Florida needs to chart the course now. The most economically competitive states in America will be grounded in clean energy and the "Sunshine State" should be a world leader.

I encourage you to be bold in establishing Florida's clean energy future and moving the state away from polluting fossil fuels and their exorbitant costs. Naysayers and vested dirty fuel interests often argue that the transition to clean energy is too costly. Actually, the cost of doing nothing - the status quo - is an enormous threat to Florida. Florida should be a national leader in building the clean energy economy and take our place among the responsible stewards of our planet for our children and future generations. You have the opportunity of a lifetime to move Florida forward and I urge you to do so with courage and vision. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Kathy Castor

Chair

U.S. House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

Cc:

Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Fried

Senate President Galvano

House Speaker Oliva

Senate Democratic Leader Gibson

House Democratic Leader McGhee

Senate Committee on Community Affairs Chair Flores

Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources Chair Montford

Senate Committee on Infrastructure & Security Chair Lee

Senate Committee on Innovation, Industry & Technology Chair Simpson

House Committee on Commerce Chair La Rosa

House Committee on Commerce Ranking Member Jenne

House Subcommittee on Energy & Utilities Chair Stone

House Subcommittee on Energy & Utilities Ranking Member Jacquet

⁷ Daudon, J., Lynch, M., Whitehouse, K., Crowe, J., Shenette, E., McKeon, N.,...Hill, D. (2019, January). *In Demand: Clean Energy, Sustainability and the New American Workforce*. Retrieved from http://edfclimatecorps.org/sites/edfclimatecorps.org/files/edf_in_demand_clean_energy_sustainability_and_the_new_american_workforce.pdf

⁸ Muro, M., Tomer, A., Shivaram, R., & Kane, J. (2019, April 18). *Advancing Inclusion Through Clean Energy Jobs*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/advancing-inclusion-through-clean-energy-jobs/>