

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1139

TITLE: Resolution Encouraging Commitment and Transparency On the University of Florida’s Sustainability Commitments

AUTHOR(S): Green Caucus Chair Zoe Richter

SPONSOR(S): Senator Jason Von Holten, Judiciary Chairman Aaron Amster, Young Democratic Socialists of America Student Government Engagement Working Group Temporary Coordinator Ronin Lupien

WHEREAS, the 2023 Climate Change Synthesis Report of the IPCC noted the rapidly narrowing window for countries to commit to greener practices with “climate change being a defining crisis of our time” [1] [2] [3]; and,

WHEREAS, the 2023 Climate Change Synthesis Report of the IPCC noted that mitigation strategies should include reduced conversion of natural ecosystems, carbon sequestration in agriculture, more efficient buildings, fuel switching, general energy efficiency, among others [3]; and,

WHEREAS, a 2023 paper in the journal, *Nature*, noted “universities are contributors to climate change and hence, often feel an obligation to address individual impacts by greening their campuses” [4]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida has a joint committee of the Office of the President and Faculty Senate called the Sustainability Committee whose responsibilities include “promot[ing] sustainability within the University and in the University's relations with the larger community and seeks to enhance the University's standing as a global leader in sustainability” [5]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida’s administration has an Office of Sustainability, whose mission statement is “...to make the University of Florida – in its operations, education, research, and outreach – a model of sustainability integrating the goals of ecological restoration, economic development, and social equity.” [6]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida’s Student Government has an agency called Gators Going Green, whose legislative intent is to “work towards implementing policies and programming which brings about sustainable improvements to the University of Florida” [7]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida’s Student Senate has a bipartisan Green Caucus with a mission to promote sustainable practices; and,

WHEREAS, the Green Caucus' former-Chairman Nathaniel Pelton authored SSB 2023-1199, wherein the Student Senate “committed to fostering a culture of sustainability at UF”[8]; and,

WHEREAS, former University President Bernie Machen in 2009 committed that “all new campus structures would be built to the second-highest green-building standard, LEED Gold, to advance conservation efforts.” [9]; and,

WHEREAS, the University is currently revising its climate action plan after the initial ‘Climate Action Plan 1.0’ from former University President Bernie Machen [10]; and,

WHEREAS, UF pledged to reduce emissions by 25% in 2021 [10]; and,

WHEREAS, the UF Office of Sustainability notes that UF has “over 900 buildings” of varying ages in its building inventory with only 20% being sustainability certified [11] [12]; and,

WHEREAS, members of the UF community have expressed concerns about UF’s commitments, which were highlighted by the ‘Don’t Pass Gas’ protests in 2021 [13]; and,

WHEREAS, experts have asserted that UF’s claimed sustainability goals are unrealistic with sustainability lecturer Stephen Mulkey noting “Both the UF and [Gainesville Regional Utilities] estimates are wildly unrealistic given the reality that there has been little meaningful effort to end reliance on fossil fuels” [13]; and,

WHEREAS, student leaders of environmental organizations have raised concerns about the success of efforts to reduce UF’s carbon footprint with Jacob York, President of the UF Green Building Club telling the Alligator “There are people within the university and university leadership that are really trying to do the right thing. For various reasons, [they] may have their hands tied.” [13]; and,

WHEREAS, students in January 2024 have raised continued concerns and called on University President Ben Sasse to “lead on environment and health” [14]; and,

WHEREAS, the Alligator reports that “some of UF’s original climate goals were completed, others failed or were reiterated in CAP 2.0.” In 2006, the university promised to achieve zero waste – when 90% or more of waste is not put in landfills – by 2015, but it failed on that promise when the deadline came” [15]; and,

WHEREAS, University President Ben Sasse has not yet publicly commented on commitment to UF’s sustainability goals [15]; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Student Senate of the University of Florida re-commits the importance of sustainable development and growth at the University of Florida.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the Student Senate of the University of Florida calls on the University of Florida Administration to publicly affirm a commitment to sustainability for UF.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the Student Senate calls upon the Sustainability Committee, Office of Sustainability, Gators Going Green, and all other official university actors to continue and publicize their work to encourage sustainability at UF.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the Student Senate of the University of Florida condemns any violations by the University of Florida that act against its stated sustainability commitments and commends the successful efforts of UF that have acted towards those commitments.

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the Student Senate of the University of Florida is committed to actively monitoring the progress of administration and the executive branch of Student Government in promoting and enacting sustainable practices.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution will be sent to Governor Ron DeSantis, Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Shawn Hamilton, University President Ben Sasse, Sustainability Committee Chair Andrew Zimmerman, Sustainability Committee Vice Chair Jessica Sheffield, Office of Sustainability Director Matthew Williams, Office of Sustainability Senior Programs Director Liz Storn, Student Body President Olivia Elizabeth Green, Gators Going Green Agency Head Samantha Simon, Student Senate Green Caucus Chair Zoe Richter, and Green Caucus Vice Chair Conor Ruffin.

[1] <https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win>

[2] <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/challenges/climate-change/solutions-climate-change/>

[3] https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf

[4] <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-45866-x>

[5] <https://fora.aa.ufl.edu/University/JointCommittees/Sustainability-Committee>

[6] <https://sustainable.ufl.edu/about/>

[7] <https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/200-Codes-Amended-Fall-2023.pdf>

[8] <https://sg.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SSB-2023-1199-Senate-Resolution-Recognizing-October-as-Sustainability-Month.pdf>

[9] <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/local/2009/04/23/gators-going-green/31607947007/>

[10] <https://www.alligator.org/article/2021/10/power-plant>

[11] <https://sustainable.ufl.edu/campus-initiatives/buildings/>

[12] <https://facilities.ufl.edu/sustainability/certified-sustainable-buildings/>

[13] <https://www.alligator.org/article/2023/04/students-faculty-fear-uf-wont-meet-2025-carbon-neutrality-goal>

