

The Miami Herald

October 30, 2009

LOCAL & STATE

Ex-Attorney General Bob Butterworth to advise FPL on rate case

Former Attorney General Bob Butterworth will advise FPL on its controversial request to increase base electric rates 30 percent.

BY STEVE BOUSQUET
HERALD/TIMES TALLAHASSEE BUREAU

TALLAHASSEE -- Bob Butterworth forged a reputation as a troubleshooter cleaning up after government scandals. Now, the former state attorney general is working for Florida Power & Light, hoping to repair a corporate image tarnished over the utility's bid for a \$1.3 billion rate increase.



Butterworth

FPL said Thursday it hired Butterworth for his "advice and feedback" on the rate case. Butterworth said he initially discussed the idea of

working for FPL with Eric Eikenberg, Gov. Charlie Crist's outgoing

chief of staff, followed by a meeting two weeks ago in the West Palm Beach office of FPL President Armando Olivera.

A Democrat viewed as consumer-friendly in his 16 years as attorney general, Butterworth said he would investigate how FPL's petition to raise base rates 30 percent alienated consumer groups and resulted in widespread critical news coverage. Gov. Charlie Crist came out against the rate increase and dumped two members of the Public Service Commission, saying he needed to "clean house" at the agency that regulates utilities.

FPL has said it needs the increase to pay for future customer growth and energy requirements.

"My whole role is to advise Florida Power & Light as to how they messed up the communications on this issue," Butterworth said. He added that his job does not involve helping the company win approval for higher rates, a decision the PSC has delayed until January when the two new commissioners take office.

Butterworth described FPL as "one of the most outstanding companies I dealt with as attorney general."

Crist's spokeswoman Erin Isaac said during Butterworth's conversation with Eikenberg, the ex-attorney general asked if he could be helpful. "Eric [Eikenberg] said anything Butterworth

was willing to do in both the rate case and ongoing PSC issues would be greatly appreciated," Isaac said in an e-mail.

FPL issued a statement saying: "Certainly there are some things we would like to have changed about the way in which we approached this case. We recognize that we have not been sufficiently sensitive to perceptions, no matter how sincerely felt, that our proposal was positive and constructive for our customers and the state."

Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, an outspoken critic of FPL's request for higher rates, said it looked like the company was trying to buy goodwill.

"You can't buy your way out of how people perceive you," Fasano said. "If Florida Power & Light wants to change the way people perceive them, they should stop asking for outrageous price increases their customers cannot afford."

Butterworth said Olivera told him he is aware that the company fumbled its request.

"He [Olivera] said, 'We blew this. Out of arrogance or anything else, we blew it.' There was nothing else I could say but yes," Butterworth said.

Butterworth said he landed FPL as a client in part because of a Herald/Times story on the FPL rate case. He was quoted in a Sept. 23 political blog post as saying: "What really surprised me is how did FPL screw up so badly. It's almost like somebody thought, all we need to do is get three votes." (A rate increase requires at least three votes of the five-member PSC).

Butterworth, a former Broward County judge and sheriff, was hired by Gov. Bob Graham in the early 1980s to head the state motor vehicle agency following a scandal there, and he later served as an interim mayor of Sunrise following a scandal there. He held the attorney general's post until 2002.

The ex-attorney general also brought stability to Florida's Department of Children & Families under Crist. He left the job as chief of the department in 2008.

Butterworth said he would not need to register as a lobbyist for FPL and would not disclose how much he is being paid.

"I have no success fee. I have an hourly rate," he said.

He is a member of the Fort Lauderdale law firm of **Atkinson, Diner, Stone, Mankuta & Ploucha**.

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