



Building People Power for Climate & Energy Justice

September 28, 2017

The Honorable Roy Cooper
North Carolina Office of the Governor
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

Subject: Legitimizing and advancing the U.S. Climate Alliance effort under your leadership

Dear Governor:

NC WARN applauds you for providing leadership in calling for action to slow climate change. As you and the 14 other governors in the U.S. Climate Alliance make clear, it is past time for concerted, meaningful action as Washington continues to fail its duty to the people of the world.

We urge you, however, to ensure the Climate Alliance efforts are genuine and effective, and that they escape the trap of promoting natural gas and power industry efforts that have badly misled the public into believing their greenhouse gas emissions are down. In addition, we offer a path whereby North Carolina can rapidly make real advances in lowering GHGs, reducing power bills and creating thousands of jobs statewide.

Regarding GHGs, the [Climate Alliance report](#) misses the mark on a crucial aspect of what prominent scientists call our climate crisis. In claiming that the 15 states have already significantly reduced GHGs and are on target to meet the Paris Accord targets, the governors badly understated the key role of natural gas, which is mainly methane.

The report uses a very low and scientifically indefensible rate for the super-potent methane that is leaked and vented unburned into the air from the natural gas industry. The 1.3% emissions rate is one promoted by the gas and electric power industries and the U.S. EPA, and it is used to make the public believe that the rapid expansion of natural gas for electricity is helping slow climate change since less coal combustion has led to lower carbon dioxide emissions.

Multiple scientific studies show that the methane emissions from natural gas production and transport are closer to 6%, which, combined with its super-potency, means that overall GHGs for Duke Energy and other utilities are actually higher now. The world's leading scientists say the recent surge in methane emissions is a [key factor](#) in the unexpected rate of global warming in recent years. Jim Hansen, the world's most prominent climatologist, and his team insist methane emissions must be dramatically reduced immediately. Cornell scientists are among those arguing that, due to its potency, curbing methane emissions in the short term is *absolutely essential* to averting runaway climate chaos. The U.S. fracking boom is a leading source of methane, and it is being driven by the expanded burning of gas by Duke and others.

Fortunately, capturing those emissions is quite cost effective, but tragically, the gas industry and Duke Energy are fighting requirements to do so. NC WARN, NC NAACP and others documented this controversy in our [Emergency Methane Resolution](#)* and letter delivered to you [on May 4](#), calling for a ban on the import of fracked gas to North Carolina, based on the industry's refusal to curb methane emissions. This would include not only the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, but also the Transco line coming from the Gulf region. More than 40 local organizations including local governments have joined that call for your action on methane.

We urge you, as Governor, to ensure that North Carolina finally begin an open and honest public debate on our shared opportunity and duty to reduce the methane emissions from Duke Energy's huge expansion of fracked gas burning. For two years, Duke Energy has gambled that the public won't find out that methane emissions make natural gas even worse than coal for the climate. That gamble – mostly successful to date – relies on the pretense that only carbon dioxide matters.

Surely we can all agree that, to the extent Duke Energy insists on burning natural gas, at the very least, it should minimize methane emissions that have immediate and devastating impacts.

To be clear: due to the methane emissions, North Carolina and probably most of the other 14 states in the Climate Alliance are actually increasing GHG emissions instead of reducing them.

A HOPEFUL PATH TOWARD MEETING YOUR COMMITMENT

There is a practical, cost-effective approach to rapidly curb GHGs that we hope you will share with your Climate Alliance colleagues as applicable in their states too. Recent leaps in battery technology by Tesla and others, combined with low solar prices and energy-saving advances, mean North Carolina can replace all fossil fuels used for electricity by 2030, and half by 2025. All utility customers can benefit – and avoid having tens of billions of their dollars spent by Duke Energy to build and fuel unneeded power plants, transmission lines and the massive Atlantic Coast, fracked gas pipeline. Solar power and battery storage are now beating fossil fuels and nuclear power in the marketplace.

That's according to veteran energy expert Bill Powers, a San Diego engineer schooled at Duke University and UNC-CH, in a new report for NC WARN, which we sent to you last month. His NC CLEAN PATH 2025 strategy is more reliable and far cheaper than Duke Energy's plans for perpetual expansion of dirty power and associated rate hikes. Mr. Powers shows how the local solar and battery approach creates far more jobs statewide – and allows people at all economic levels to save money without financial burden. Solar power is now cheaper than grid power. For businesses, solar combined with batteries are far cheaper than the grid.

There are no economic or technical barriers to its adoption by the large utilities, although the smaller public utilities are adopting local solar and battery storage more quickly in the U.S. so far. The barrier is Duke Energy's longstanding monopoly control over state governments, captive customers, and public debate.

The CLEAN PATH report is matched with an [Action Plan](#) so cities and residents can fulfill recent pledges to help slow the accelerating climate crisis – by ramping up solar panels at homes, buildings, parking areas, and on vacant urban land, combined with battery storage. We're

reaching out to scientists, civic leaders, news media – and all civic-minded North Carolinians across the political spectrum – to press Duke Energy CEO Lynn Good and elected leaders to join the effort – and to demand an open, constructive discussion about decisions involving our energy and climate challenge.

NC CLEAN PATH 2025 is an opportunity for North Carolina to provide leadership in the urgent challenge to slow climate change in this time when leading scientists are imploring society that only dramatic action can avert runaway climate chaos.

URGENT NEED FOR HONEST DEBATE

The recent super-storms striking the U.S. and other large-scale disasters have become virtually commonplace around the world. The global heat wave that began in 2014 continues, with average temperatures [much higher](#) than any previous years on record, and NASA reports that July 2017 was the [hottest month](#) ever recorded. Dr. Jim Hansen says global warming is getting worse, not better as widely reported, and that “we are running out of time.” Globally and in North Carolina, people of color and the poor – those least responsible for the high consumption lifestyles scorching our planet – are being disproportionately harmed.

North Carolina desperately needs your leadership to demand and create honest and open discussion regarding the climate crisis, this state’s contributions to it, and the very hopeful breakthroughs on solar power and battery storage that could make all the difference. Climate change is harming many North Carolinians and it is accelerating – but for all these years, no one has yet fostered the open discussion needed to address that critical question: What can North Carolina really do to help?

At this truly crucial time for humanity, please help North Carolina and the other 14 states escape the cloak of corporate obfuscation and influence that has so far denied our society its best chance to address the existential threat to humanity posed by climate change. Please tell me that you will demand and foster the open democratic debate so badly need at this critical time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Warren". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jim Warren
Executive Director

cc. Rev. Dr. William Barber II
Attorney General Josh Stein
Secretary Michael Regan

* The Emergency Methane Action resolution has now been endorsed by nearly 80 nonprofits, faith and civic leaders, businesses and local governments.