

NEWS RELEASE  
July 8, 2010

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## **Solar Power now Cheaper than New Nuclear in NC**

*Former Duke chancellor, economist cites “historic crossover” ... says solar costs keep dropping as nuclear costs climb – and that utilities should stop rejecting solar*

DURHAM, NC – Solar electricity has become cheaper than juice from new nuclear power plants in North Carolina, and will be far less expensive before nukes could be built. That’s according to a major new report by the former chancellor of Duke University and emeritus chair of its economics department, who also said power companies are rejecting solar energy that’s priced below what new nuclear power would cost. Moreover, he said, nuclear utilities are seeking additional, massive public subsidies and additional transfer of financial risks to electricity customers and taxpayers.

**“North Carolina should be leading, not lagging, in the transition to clean energy,”** Dr. John Blackburn said during a press briefing today. **“We call on Governor Perdue and state agencies to see that a very important turning point has been reached, and act accordingly.”** He explained that the fast-growing worldwide solar industry is poised to bring thousands of manufacturing and installation jobs to North Carolina if the utilities will stop impeding its development.

Clean energy proponents have long awaited the day when solar and nuclear prices cross. Solar photovoltaic and hot water system costs have fallen steadily for years, and are projected to fall even more over the next 10 years due to manufacturing and installation advances. Meanwhile, design problems and rising cost estimates have led to delays and cancellations of U.S. nuclear projects.

The report explains that states with open competition for electricity sales are rejecting the nuclear gamble in favor of the combined economic and environmental benefits of solar, wind, cogeneration and energy efficiency; at least 20 states are ahead of North Carolina in developing clean energy. By contrast, the report shows, states with monopoly power markets are the ones still proposing to build new nuclear plants – with each project absorbing billions of public dollars.

The emeritus professor produced an “apples to apples” cost comparison, net of incentives for both technologies, based on interviews with solar installers across the state and published reports of solar trends and cost estimates to build nuclear plants. His report includes “rooftop” solar photovoltaic systems for homes and businesses, along with large solar “farm” installations.

**“This state should place a cost cap on new nuclear power – and remove the one on solar,”** added Blackburn, referring to legislation in 2007 restricting rate increases for solar energy while requiring that 0.2% of all utility sales be solar power. Solar installers and advocates have complained for months that the utilities are doing the bare minimum on renewables and energy efficiency so they can

keep arguing for the need to build nuclear plants.

The economist, who has analyzed energy issues since the mid-1970s, produced the report for clean energy nonprofit NC WARN. It was co-authored by Sam Cunningham, a masters candidate at the Duke University Nicholas School for the Environment. The authors emphasize that solar prices should be compared to new nuclear plant costs, and that electric rates will rise much less with a clean-energy approach.

NC WARN sent the solar-nuclear report to Governor Perdue today and asked for a meeting to brief her about the new economics of energy and the implications it has for North Carolina. The clean energy advocates also asked for the Governor's help in developing the financing mechanisms for solar energy that are proving successful in other states.

**“We are asking the Governor to take the leadership in creating the new solar economy,”** said NC WARN attorney John Runkle today. **“The biggest barriers to solar electricity are the electric utilities, and if they begin construction on nuclear plants, our electricity rates will skyrocket and our solar industry will continue to be impeded.”**

As Dr. Blackburn reported earlier this year, even modest increases in efficiency and clean energy sources, when used in combination, will avoid the need for new nuclear plants. That approach will even allow the phase-out of the state's coal power plants – which climatologists say must happen within 20 years.

**“This report should be a game changer if our democratic institutions do their jobs,”** said NC WARN director Jim Warren today. **“There is a global energy transition underway, one that is crucially needed to rebuild our economies and tackle the climate crisis. North Carolina's big utilities need to either contribute to that transition or get out of the way and watch rooftop solar and other sources of distributed energy capture the market.”**

**“We're urging people who are financially able to invest in rooftop solar – PV and/or hot water – to do so right away,”** he added. Warren explained that this will help the customer, help grow the solar market, and help everyone by cutting energy demand and pollution. **“This report should end the argument for risking billions of public dollars on new nuclear projects.”**

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See the solar-nuclear report at the top right of [www.ncwarn.org](http://www.ncwarn.org)

*NC WARN is a member-based nonprofit tackling the accelerating crisis posed by climate change – along with the various risks of nuclear power – by watch-dogging utility practices and working for a swift North Carolina transition to energy efficiency and clean power generation. In partnership with other citizen groups, NC WARN uses sound scientific research to inform and involve the public in key decisions regarding their wellbeing.*