



January 29, 2020

Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of North Carolina
116 West Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603

Subject: More warning signs on gas – and hopeful news on renewables+storage

Dear Governor Cooper,

We copied you on an August [letter](#) to Duke Energy CEO Lynn Good citing recent news items containing dire climate and economic warnings against continued investment in natural gas infrastructure. The new compilation below shows the trend continuing, as even more leading investors, scientists, utilities and government officials realize that the urgently needed shift away from fossil fuels also makes economic sense.

Fortunately, clean energy alternatives are available and cheaper than new gas. As [Forbes reports](#), skyrocketing investment in energy storage is “*already contributing to cancellations of planned natural-gas power generation.*” That’s based on Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) [research](#) showing how rapidly gas is being replaced across the U.S. by renewables matched with batteries, efficiency and energy balancing measures such as demand management programs.

Therefore, NC WARN again urges you to do everything in your power to stop the massive expansion of natural gas power plants and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline that Duke Energy is pursuing in our state.

GAS = METHANE = CLIMATE DISASTER

Since 2015, NC WARN has focused on top scientists’ urgent concerns about unburned methane being vented directly into the atmosphere throughout the natural gas infrastructure. Earlier this month, [Dr. James Hansen’s](#) team reported that “*The rate of global warming has accelerated in the past decade ... Global warming is linked to increasing long-lived atmospheric greenhouse gases, especially CO₂ and CH₄[methane], and in turn these are linked to a substantial degree with fossil fuel use.*” [emphasis added]

[From the Wall Street Journal](#): “*In the U.S. alone, the methane that leaks or is released from oil and gas operations annually is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions from more than 69 million cars.*”

[New York Times](#): “*Immense amounts of methane are escaping from oil and gas sites nationwide, worsening global warming, even as the Trump administration weakens restrictions on offenders ...*”

In addition, as top climatologist [Drew Shindell](#) [told you](#) in an October letter, developed nations need to be fossil fuel free by 2040, so “*the time is now to stop building more fossil fuel infrastructure across the nation.*” He urged you to take the lead by halting new pipelines and power plants in North Carolina.

[As RMI put it](#), “*the U.S. cannot afford to lock in future carbon emissions by investing in gas or other fossil fuel[s]. ... We are currently heading in the wrong direction and need to reverse course.*”

Joe Daniel, senior energy analyst with the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#) concurs: “*If the current pipeline of gas plants were to get built, it would make decarbonizing the power sector by 2050 nearly impossible.*”

Your own Clean Energy Plan recognizes these facts. It would be societal madness to allow investment in new fossil fuel projects that are designed to operate for many decades.

RENEWABLES BEATING GAS ON ECONOMICS AND RELIABILITY

[Forbes](#) reported on an [RMI](#) warning that massive investments in battery technologies “*are already contributing to cancellations of planned natural-gas power generation,*” that “[n]ew natural-gas plants risk becoming stranded assets, and that existing natural-gas plants will cease to be competitive as soon as 2021.” [emphasis added]

[Morgan Stanley and Moody’s analysts](#) expect that more electric utilities will accelerate their transition away from coal due to “*the surprisingly low cost of renewables*” and save customers up to \$8 billion each year. Some major investors are urging this transition, while growing opposition to natural gas – including by state regulators – could further speed the transition to renewable energy.

[BlackRock](#), one of the world’s largest investment managers, has announced changes – including “*new funds that shun fossil fuel-oriented stocks.*” BlackRock “*has the influence to change the conversations inside boardrooms around the globe,*” as reported by [The New York Times](#).

[PacifiCorp](#), a utility serving six states, is replacing coal plants with thousands of megawatts of solar and wind paired with storage, an approach that’s lower cost than building gas plants.

[Wall Street Journal](#): “*As gas displaces coal for electricity ... investors [are] fretting about how gas will compete over the long term against renewable energy sources such as wind and solar...*”

[Bloomberg News](#): Global wind and solar power is expanding “*at a ferocious clip. ... [I]t’s hard for us to conceive of the end of the hydrocarbon era. And yet financial markets appear to be ahead of us*”

[New York and Massachusetts](#) recently joined others in pairing energy storage with renewables. Surely we can do even better in sunny North Carolina.

It is clear to most observers that Duke Energy leaders realize the transition away from fossil fuels is inevitable; they are trying to lock billions of gas infrastructure dollars into the rate-making system before making the shift, despite the likelihood that customers would get stuck paying for the failed investments. State action is urgently needed to ensure that North Carolinians benefit from the superior economics of renewables, storage, efficiency and demand management.

There are many ways that you can help this transition. The [Virginia attorney general](#) recently told the US Supreme Court that the Atlantic Coast Pipeline is not needed and should be stopped. DEQ Secretary Michael Regan, in [addressing](#) the recent coal ash settlement told *The News & Observer* that the state “will continue to hold [Duke Energy] accountable for their actions as we protect public health, the environment and our natural resources.”

It is time for North Carolina to lead Duke Energy rather than following the giant corporation’s disastrous path any longer. We must stop promoting the business-as-usual incrementalism advocated by Duke Energy that keeps harming communities and falls short of the target scientists demand.

To repeat Dr. Shindell’s appeal to you in October, “*The global community needs true leadership at this critical time,*” and that means halting new gas projects. We are eager to help you to take that leadership role.

Sincerely,

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

Jim Warren
Executive Director

cc. Attorney General Josh Stein
Secretary Michael Regan
Duke Energy CEO Lynn Good