



Building People Power for Climate & Energy Justice

May 2, 2018

Connie Walker
President and General Manager
WUNC Radio

Subject: Correcting the record for a second time; media failure on Duke Energy, fracked gas and accelerating climate urgency

Dear Ms. Walker,

Thank you for responding to listeners who contacted you following NC WARN's [April 20th letter](#), which addressed shortcomings in your [March 25th story](#) on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and in your overall coverage of energy during an age of accelerating climate crisis.

Unfortunately, once again, your reply to listeners entirely missed the point of our mutual concerns and made several claims that are inaccurate, while addressing virtually none of the elements from my letter. We are calling for WUNC to cover important climate and energy issues, and to scrutinize Duke Energy's talking points instead of repeating them.

[Your reply](#) misrepresented these valid concerns as a complaint that NC WARN was not getting enough air time. This is a clear diversion. WUNC has cited us hundreds of times in newscasts over the years. Our dissatisfaction is that your news staffers – who are clearly capable of synthesizing complicated issues – are not being allowed to do their jobs. The station reports on climate and energy issues only up to the point at which any information challenges Duke Energy's business model.

Your claim that WUNC has comprehensively covered the interconnected issues of fracking, climate urgency and Duke Energy's huge expansion of fracked gas is incorrect based even on the [record you provided](#) after initial complaints about the ACP story, as explained in detail in our April 20th letter.

You also implied to listeners that your managing editor has met with me regarding our concerns, when in fact neither he nor the news director nor *The State of Things* host has accepted my multiple requests to meet over the past two years. This is the very time during which WUNC, NPR and most others have increasingly failed to cover the fracking-climate-utility connection, or to report on trends showing how [solar power with storage](#) could rapidly phase out coal and gas. This is also a period when scientific evidence has progressively shown that the US fracking boom has become a leading driver of climate disruption and that the planetary emergency has moved within two years of passing a point of no return.

A recap of key issues virtually ignored or actively misstated by WUNC and most other media:

1. Duke Energy's vast expansion of fracked gas is making climate change worse – not better, as reported.
2. The climate crisis is well underway and hyper-urgent. The public is given the impression that humanity has decades to solve it, even as millions of people are devastated each year.
3. Stanching methane emissions from the gas-electricity sector is cost-effective and utterly essential to slowing climate change in the near term; Duke opposes such requirements.
4. Duke Energy does the bare minimum in renewables – 2 percent – while stifling their growth.
5. Cheaper, superior renewable energy and storage technologies are available and can help all customers while quickly replacing fossil fuels.

In your reply to listeners, you assert – as you did the first time – that WUNC has comprehensively covered the issues listed in our complaint. I doubt that many listeners would consider your brief pieces on methane – the latest airing a year ago – to justify the term “comprehensive.” Those pieces dealt with only one aspect of the broader issues listed above. Moreover, since that time your stories continue repeating the industry line. You wrote that you cannot cover “every aspect” in a news story, but your March 25th story cited gas as clean or safe four times without any counterpoint.

The problem is not with WUNC alone. Most North Carolina media won't even mention climate change and some reporters have been specifically directed not to do so. Even while heavily covering the increasingly bizarre weather and devastating extremes, the media never mention the science showing the link to global warming. Never. The national news media do the same thing, tragically.

I know dozens of strong reporters who want to tell these stories, and it is clear that news media *executives* are the problem – along with gas and power industry pressure. But every person in the news business will live with the question of whether they did their best as humanity moves toward runaway climate and social chaos.

The failure of the US news media is central to this nation's continuing failure to take steps that could make a real difference in slowing the climate crisis. Our democracy is broken when the Duke Energys and Koch brothers of the world successfully disinform the public while the press and government regulators shield the corporations from even having to debate issues critical to our very survival.

Pioneering journalist Ida B. Wells said: "The people must know before they can act, and there is no educator to compare with the press." Media executives seem to no longer recognize that duty.

I urge you to help lead a surge of public discussion that still, at this very late hour, could make a difference. Carefully consider my in-depth April 20th complaint and respond with detail. Far better: simply unleash the fine journalists at WUNC to begin holding Duke Energy executives accountable for their role as a leading polluter and their moral duty to change course.

Sincerely,



Jim Warren
Executive Director