



**BUILDING PEOPLE POWER
FOR ENERGY & CLIMATE JUSTICE**

September 20, 2023

Roy Cooper
Governor of North Carolina

Subject: Duke Energy's *Pro*-Carbon Plan and Urgent Need for Your Genuine Climate Leadership Instead of Pretense

Dear Governor Cooper,

With North Carolina communities being repeatedly devastated by weather disasters and fearing worse to come, and with the global climate crisis quickly exacerbating trends toward social, economic and political chaos, the world is starving for genuine leadership.

NC WARN once again implores you to match your stated climate concerns with genuine action to stop Duke Energy leaders from continuing to make the crisis worse by greatly expanding fossil fuels while suppressing cheaper, clean-energy solutions. We implore you to finally align with the prominent scientists demanding that North Carolina must change course dramatically.

For several years, you and Duke Energy have drawn praise for talking about the climate crisis. Sadly, deceptive corporate greenwashing has distorted the public narrative and media coverage, leading the public to believe North Carolina is on the right track – a tragic and dangerous misunderstanding. In fact, the latest Duke Energy *Pro*-Carbon Plan maintains the pattern of promoting monopoly-driven, profit-oriented, false solutions while impeding even a consideration of a [proven path](#) that could quickly phase out fossil-fueled electricity, create jobs and keep power bills low.

Recent polling by [Conservatives for Clean Energy](#) reaffirms that a competitive, clean-energy approach would be overwhelmingly popular across the political spectrum.

We implore you to move beyond pretense at this crucial time in our history.

SIDE WITH SCIENCE - NOT DUKE ENERGY EXECUTIVES

Leading climate scientists have openly pressed you for nearly four years to stop Duke Energy's massive expansion of power generation using fracked gas. [Globally renowned experts](#) such as Drew Shindell of Duke University have described to you – repeatedly and explicitly – that this expansion will overmatch all other climate protection efforts you are attempting.

Moreover, as Dr. Shindell emphasizes, curbing methane emissions from the use of gas is an essential step if humanity is to slow global heating – and doing so could help “very, very quickly” due to methane’s super-potency as a heat trapping gas. Inexplicably, you and Duke Energy still pretend that we should focus only on carbon dioxide emissions.

Here’s a snapshot of Duke Energy leaders’ plans for North Carolina:

- Duke continues planning to build dozens of fracked gas-fired power units (far in excess of what’s needed to merely replace coal).
- Duke Energy continues its years-long suppression of cheaper, faster, climate solutions, particularly local solar-plus-storage and efficiency programs. (Open appeals to you in 2022 and in [May by dozens of solar companies](#) seeking your help against Duke’s attack on solar net metering have been answered only by your silence.)
- Duke leaders are blindly heading into years of controversy by trying to spend \$10 billion building and expanding unneeded high-voltage power lines and towers while seizing land from some of the same farmers and low-income communities who led the defeat of the \$8 billion Atlantic Coast (gas) Pipeline. While Duke claims this might someday lead to mega-sized solar farms – which would also be highly controversial – NC WARN believes Duke hopes to use this expanded transmission to solidify its fossil- and nuclear-based grid. Regardless, the timing fully clashes with the science demanding that the *phase-out* of fossil fuels must begin right now.

In short, Duke Energy remains on a capital intensive, monopoly model to spend as much captive-ratepayer money as possible while suppressing clean energy competition and misleading the public. Duke’s aim is to impress global investors, while here in North Carolina, scores of clean energy companies, scientists, faith groups and thousands of residents have already pressed for your leadership to make real change. Be assured that those voices will continue to grow.

Instead, you have continued to side with Duke’s pro-carbon, anti-renewables business plan and its distortion and suppression of honest debate.

We appreciate the few times you have mentioned the need to [get off the gas track](#), as quoted by The News & Observer. But those occasions are drowned by frequent boasting of your deal with Duke Energy and Senate leader Berger resulting in the *Pro-Carbon Plan*, as you stated in that same article: “North Carolina has become a leader in clean energy and the fight against climate change.”

In fact, Duke Energy is among the few things that ever bring you and Berger together. But all of you are in full-blown conflict with climate science and the needs of North Carolinians.

DISTURBING REGULATORY BIAS

Further detail is provided in NC WARN’s June 26 call for you and Attorney General Josh Stein to [investigate misleading information](#) Duke provided to your NC Utilities Commission regarding its multi-billion-dollar transmission scheme. We also described those regulators’ continuing evasion of

even a *discussion* about alternatives to Duke’s 2022 Carbon Plan, which were provided by several nonprofits and largely supported by the attorney general’s office and businesses.

Such regulatory avoidance continues a disturbing, decades-long pattern of the Commission’s bias in favor of Duke Energy. As just one example, in 2022 your Commission even declined to conduct evidentiary hearings on either the Carbon Plan or solar net metering – despite widespread and intense controversy and public interest in each case – before firmly siding with Duke Energy.

Attorney General Stein did express concern about the issues into which we’re seeking investigation, but we know nothing about your position. Will you again leave such vital questions to your regulators?

FALSE SOLUTIONS AND GREENWASHING

Not only does Duke Energy’s claim for decarbonization rely absurdly on greatly expanding fossil fuels, it relies on other approaches that are both unnecessary and likely to fail.

There are highly credible reports that US utility executives know that hydrogen will never replace natural gas in power plants. “Carbon capture and storage” is yet another decades-long pipe dream replete with failure, such as Duke Energy’s debacle in Edwardsport, Indiana. Duke even wants to risk building “small modular” nuclear reactors despite having squandered 13 years and billions of dollars trying to build “advanced” Westinghouse nuclear reactors, [a well-predicted fiasco](#) that ended in 2017.

Duke leaders remain zealously fixated on driving up the stock price while exhibiting a pathological disregard for all the pain they are causing. Their monopoly game relies on maximizing capital investments no matter how outrageous – because captive customers absorb the risks.

TIME IS SHORT FOR TRUE LEADERSHIP

Too many people are already suffering, often those least responsible for a crisis driven by decades of high consumption and corporate recklessness. The science makes clear that the odds for averting runaway climate, social and economic chaos are low, but a genuine shift by one of the largest US climate polluters, Duke Energy, could be pivotal in turning the tide. That’s precisely why prominent scientists have worked with NC WARN to call for your leadership over recent years.

Amid these troubling and dangerous times, your genuine climate action would provide hope to the NC communities already hammered by multiple superstorms and staring at the likelihood of even worse to come. As you know, thousands of families – disproportionately poor and/or Black, Brown and Indigenous people – still are [out of their homes](#) destroyed years ago by hurricanes.

As I recently told our contact in your office:

“This challenge comes at a pivotal juncture: Will North Carolina ever actually shift toward climate protection, or remain under the spell of Duke Energy greenwashing, which the Governor continues to support despite Duke’s massive expansion of fossil fuels? NC WARN

and allies remain eager to be able to switch to publicly appreciating the Governor but it must be based on moves that actually can help avert climate-social-economic chaos.”

Below are a few particular ways you could become the climate champion we need so badly:

- 1) Declare a climate emergency, then use your authority under the NC Emergency Management Act to [alter corporate behavior](#), as you did during the pandemic, to stop Duke Energy’s fracked gas expansion.*
- 2) Work with Attorney General Stein to investigate the issues raised in NC WARN’s [June 26, 2023](#) letter. In particular, create a new type of public dialogue and decision-making in a process that’s not constantly dominated by Duke Energy’s influence. Surely you agree that, at this critical juncture, quicker, cheaper alternatives to Duke Energy’s Carbon Plan should at least be openly debated.*
- 3) Use your relationship with Duke Energy executives to demand a genuine transition to clean energy. The very purpose of its corporate greenwashing is to pretend that Duke leaders are doing what they know North Carolinians want: renewable power and an end to constant rate hikes.*
- 4) Make clear to Duke Energy that North Carolina will not allow construction of the MVP-Southgate fracked gas pipeline.*
- 5) Speak out against Duke’s joint attacks on residential and commercial/nonprofit solar net metering.*
- 6) Use your powerful public voice as governor to insist on a genuine climate-protection, pro-clean energy path. You have been openly demanding that Disney and Spectrum reach a deal so the people of NC can enjoy sporting events; the climate crisis deserves at least that much.*

Governor, I appreciate your good work on a variety of issues. I know that both Duke Energy and your administration have many dedicated staffers who are eager to help lead a genuine shift to clean, affordable, wisely-used energy. As noted above, NC WARN very much wants to hail your actions instead of criticizing you, and we are redoubling our longstanding call for all North Carolinians to press for your genuine leadership at this most urgent time.

I deeply hope that you will accept this challenge with the earnestness, determination and good spirit with which it is issued.

Sincerely,



Jim Warren
Executive Director

cc. Attorney General Josh Stein