



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

November 20, 2023

Honorable Roy A. Cooper
Governor of North Carolina

Subject: Your criticism of Duke Energy's plans for dozens of experimental nuclear reactors was validated by the collapse of the US Department of Energy's lead project

Dear Governor Cooper,

We again commend you for beginning to openly criticize Duke Energy's high-risk plans to greatly expand the use of both natural gas and unproven nuclear reactors, and your call for Duke and the NC Utilities Commission (NCUC) to instead prioritize a genuine transition to renewable power.

You were right on target – evidenced 12 days ago by the virtual collapse of NuScale, a corporation that has struggled for many years to lead yet another attempted revival of nuclear power. The failure of NuScale to finalize the design and operationalize a “small modular reactor” (SMR) – after many years of cost escalation, failed deadlines, and \$600 million in DOE subsidies – is, as Reuters proclaimed, “... a blow to U.S. ambitions for a wave of nuclear energy.”

“The collapse of the US Department of Energy’s flagship small modular reactor (SMR) project should serve as a cautionary tale to SMR developers everywhere.” That’s the lead of last Friday’s article in [Energy Intelligence](#), which explains that DOE has already poured \$3 billion in tax money into SMR development since 2012, much of it for a Babcock & Wilcox design that was regarded as the industry leader until that project collapsed in 2017.

As you pointed out last month in criticizing Duke Energy leaders, they have banked heavily on building SMRs despite the elusive technology and poor economics. In fact, their latest (pro)-Carbon Plan projects to build dozens of such reactors.

The failure of NuScale adds to the multiple pressures for Duke CEO Lynn Good to quit gambling on non-existent technologies like SMRs and “hydrogen-capable” gas turbines, and to finally prioritize genuine clean energy solutions that will help slow the climate crisis instead of making it worse.

However, as we pointed out to you in our [November 9 letter](#), Duke Energy has had far too much control over the NCUC for decades. Thus, without your increasing involvement and that of the Attorney General’s office, the NCUC will let Duke Energy bleed ratepayers year after year while promising that someday, SMRs and “hydrogen-capable gas” will become viable.

That is precisely what Duke Energy did with the extremely hyped but miserably failed “Advanced Passive 1000” nuclear reactor, a 13-year fiasco that wasted over \$2 billion in Duke ratepayer dollars

by 2017 in the Carolinas and Florida. Duke's failure was matched by other utilities across the Southeast, even bankrupting the Westinghouse Corporation along the way.

NC WARN was in the thick of that years-long and well-predicted failure. State and federal regulators kept going along with utilities' repeated promises that success was just around the corner, despite solid evidence that the entire AP1000 effort was predicated on cutting corners.

To our chagrin, through all those years Duke and other monopolies kept hindering renewables, a tragedy continuing to this day. After it refused to even conduct an evidentiary hearing, the NCUC's rubber-stamping of Duke's attack on net metering, which began taking effect last month, is already seriously harming solar installers even as a strong court appeal by NC WARN and allies is underway.

Duke's attack on net metering is particularly harmful because local solar-plus-storage is by far the fastest, cheapest way this state could reach your carbon goals, as we have detailed to you in the past. Other states and nations are quickly shifting to energy-saving and renewables because they are far cheaper than dirty power and can actually help avert climate chaos.

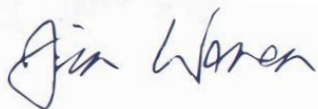
Governor Cooper, as you have recently been reflecting publicly, Duke Energy leaders are plainly ruining North Carolina's chances to help avert full-blown climate and social chaos. Their SMR plan – even under Duke's own optimistic timeframe – would bring the first unit online [in 2034](#). As you know, this completely fails global climate scientists demands for major changes by 2030.

If CEO Lynn Good continues to bank so heavily on unproven, economically inferior technologies, it only proves that she expects the NCUC to continue protecting the monopoly's interests instead of North Carolinians being repeatedly harmed by climate disasters and constant hikes in their power bills. She also will have retired long before this sorry tale is complete.

This is the time for your decisive action. We simply cannot allow Duke Energy and the NCUC to spend yet another year using a broken system to perpetuate the monopoly game. We have previously suggested a number of [specific steps](#) you can take to use your authority and demand open decision-making for the unprecedented climate and energy challenges that threaten to grow even worse.

Thank you again for speaking out in favor of genuine climate solutions. NC WARN and allies are here to support you in taking further actions.

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. Attorney General Josh Stein