

CONSUMERS **★AGAINST★** **RATE HIKES**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 8, 2013

CONTACT:

Steve Hahn (919) 508-0271
shahn@arp.org

GROUPS URGE NC UTILITY COMMISSION TO PROTECT PUBLIC INTEREST WHEN WEIGHING DUKE ENERGY'S LONG-TERM OPERATING PLANS

RALEIGH –A broad range of consumer, energy, environmental and religious advocates gathered at the entrance to the Public Utilities Commission today to urge members to act in the best interests of residential, municipal and small business ratepayers when they review the Integrated Resource Plan of Duke Energy, North Carolina's largest electric utility provider.

On Monday evening, the Utilities Commission will hold a public hearing on the long-term plans by Duke Energy and its subsidiary Progress Energy to use ratepayer money to meet the future energy demands of North Carolina. The plans, as currently proposed, could lead to significant, ongoing rate increases to meet the future energy demands of North Carolina. Such increases come in addition to the 7.2% rate hike approved by the NCUC last year and a pending double digit increase currently before the Commission.

Today's protesters believe the company's plans place undue burdens on residential ratepayers, overstate future electricity demand, and fail to address environmental concerns through the appropriate use of energy efficiency and clean energy.

John Runkle, and attorney representing NC WARN, Greenpeace, and Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League in the hearings, said, "The fight for a cheaper and cleaner energy future this year starts at the Commission's public hearing on Monday night. Duke and Progress are charting a future that would more than double customers' rates while continuing to pollute our environment and drive climate change."

NC WARN and Greenpeace released separate reports that outline ways Duke can meet demand while reducing greenhouse emissions without building new natural gas or nuclear plants. Runkle said, "There is a responsible energy future path forward. It is much cheaper and much cleaner. And it is what is required by law."

Pastor Steve Halsted of the Community United Church of Christ in Raleigh, representing NC Interfaith Power and Light, favors a cleaner path forward and said, "Through advocacy, we work for public policy that supports the health of the earth's ecosystems and that serves justice and respect for all life."

Deborah Tyler-Horton, associate state director of AARP, was there with a group of seniors who are worried how they will keep up with yearly rate hikes which are already challenging many fixed-income customers. "Small Social Security cost-of-living adjustments are not keeping up with the rising cost of

food, medicine, transportation and other daily living expenses. When it comes to keeping the lights on, it is a matter of public safety.”

Rochelle Sparko, an attorney for the Housing Coalition at the NC Justice Center said, “Both Duke and Progress have asked the Commission to approve double digit rate increases in 2013 and with long-term plans to repeatedly seek rate hikes.

She said hikes will hit low income people hardest. “What was nearly a quarter of a million households disconnected last year because of non-payment may soon be epidemic under the current economic conditions we face.”

The General Assembly has cut back unemployment benefits more than 9 percent of North Carolina’s workforce looking for jobs. It is also denying health care coverage to a half-million more by not expanding Medicaid. Utility rate increases that lead to non-payments are a growing threat to more and more residents.”

Stella J. Adams, of the NAACP NC, said her organization has joined partners in opposing this proposed rate hike and will not support any utility rate increase that unfairly burdens residential ratepayers in order to subsidize the massive usage of commercial and industrial customers.

Adams said, “The NAACP has asked the Commission to conduct an analysis of the proposed rate hikes on customers in census tracts with incomes 80% or below the Household Median Income (HMI). Since the year 2013, North Carolina has had a poverty rate hovering over 17 percent.”

Since mid-December, the groups have been collecting thousands of petition signatures from people who are against the rate hikes. They intend to present the signatures to Commission members before the first round of rate hike hearings begin later this month.

Becky Ceartas, field organizer for Greenpeace said, “The measures that add up to the most savings are the ones that most effectively manage the state’s increasing demand -- ones that involve efficiency.”

While the Commission has traditionally only dealt with issues related to rates and service, we need to focus their attention on the health, climate and financial effects of burning fossil fuels. From the increased medical costs of childhood asthma and mental retardation to the climate change-driven devastation we see caused by Superstorms like Sandy, the “least cost” plans the Commission needs examine compare both the direct and indirect costs to North Carolina ratepayers.”

For a copy of the new NC WARN report: A Responsible Energy Future for North Carolina: An Alternative to the Duke Energy-Progress Energy Plan for the Crucial Years 2013-2032.

Visit: <http://www.ncwarn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Responsible-Energy-Future.pdf>

For a copy of NC WARN’s related new report: Combined Heat and Power in North Carolina: Replacing Large Power Plants by Putting Wasted Energy to Work,” visit: www.ncwarn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/CHP-Report-FINAL.pdf

For a copy of the 2012 Greenpeace report “Charting the Correction Course: A Clean Energy Pathway for Duke Energy” visit: <http://quitcoal.org/Duke-Solutions-Pathway>

To sign a petition against the Duke and Progress rate increases, visit <http://action.aarp.org>

###