

# Back promises with action

## N.C. waiting for Duke to scrap plan for dirty coal-fired units

BY TOM TAFT

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Using all the bright lights and neon signs you'd expect to find at a street carnival, Duke Energy has made a big show recently of its plans to meet future energy demands in our state.

Releasing public statements that seem to promise low utility rates, a clean environment and future jobs, the energy giant has outlined a simple problem: an increasing demand for energy which, Duke says, will require an increased energy supply.

Company officials have told us that new dirty units at its Cliffside power plant are the cheapest way to meet this demand, and they've asked the state Utilities Commission - the agency charged with approving such a project - for the green light. All the while, the company has promised to consider energy-saving measures in the future. But looking into Duke Energy's plan for the future of energy in our state is like looking into a funhouse mirror: What you see is not necessarily what you get.

### Rhetorical statements?

What the energy giant wants us to see is its stated commitment to low-cost energy, energy efficiency, cleaner-coal technology, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CEO Jim Rogers and Duke Energy Carolinas President Ellen Ruff have repeatedly and publicly stated such commitments, at least rhetorically. The company also reminds us that investments in new cleaner-

burning, highly efficient facilities would allow it to retire old, dirty plants. And just last week Jim Rogers made a promise - although stopping short of an actual obligation or working plan - to spend \$50 million a year on energy saving measures in the future.

It's a positive step if Rogers' promise signals that Duke is beginning to understand that it must take energy efficiency seriously. But Rogers' words, standing alone, are not nearly enough. Not only is the pledge at the low end of what other leaders in the industry are making to energy efficiency, Rogers made his pledge subject to qualifications, he included no deadlines or goals for meaningful energy savings, and Duke has made no specific or binding commitment. Most important, this promise is not yet a reality. In the meantime, what is a reality is that Duke plans to build another dirty, coal-fired power plant that uses outdated technology and pumps out pollution and greenhouse gasses for generations to come.

### Fuzzy assurances

Unlike Duke's fuzzy assurances that at some point in the future it will increase its commitment to energy efficiency, the Cliffside expansion is a tangible proposal currently in front of the state. Ironically, Rogers and Ruff admitted to the state that they didn't really explore how much money could be saved using energy-efficiency techniques in North Carolina before submitting that proposal. And even though Duke continues to move forward with its increasingly expensive plan, it still hasn't even fully studied, let alone implemented, these energy and cost-saving measures. All the while, the Cliffside units proposed won't utilize the cleaner-coal technology that Duke officials admit is the way of the future.

North Carolina deserves better. Dirty coal-burning power plants are major con-

tributors to smog, soot and mercury pollution as well as greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. These emissions lead to a host of public health problems, including asthma, lung disease and developmental delays in children, to say nothing of the social and economic costs of climate change. There is something troubling about costs that hit both our pocketbooks and our health. With a projected plant lifespan of up to 60 years, the new units at Cliffside will ultimately require our children and grandchildren to pay the price.

### Alternatives exist

The good news is that cost-effective alternatives do exist. Energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, and even cleaner coal technology are a better deal than building a dirty power plant, and pursuing these options is the best way to keep electricity rates low.

Duke is saying some of the right things - that it is invested in meeting the state's energy demand through clean and responsible measures. While the promise it made this week may signal that Duke is beginning to get serious about these issues, so far Duke's business-as-usual actions speak louder than its words. Now is the time for Duke to take actions that match its promises. This means scrapping its plan to build additional dirty coal units at Cliffside until it explores and implements energy efficiency programs that meet as much of the state's energy needs as economically possible. If Duke can show that new coal units are still necessary, those units should use the cleanest coal technology available. That's what it will take for Duke to show North Carolinians that its promises mean something.

Tom Taft is a Duke Energy shareholder, developer, former state senator and member of the boards of Environmental Defense and the Southern Environmental Law Center.



Taft