

OP-ED: Cliffside critics ignore facts

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From Ellen Ruff, president of Duke Energy Carolinas:

The environmental facts about our Cliffside Power Plant modernization were ignored in a recent column by two local physicians and in recent full-page advertisements funded by groups outside of our state.

We have worked on our plans to modernize our Cliffside plant for more than two years and we are very proud of the project. The project calls for shutting down 200 megawatts of old units at the site and building a new state-of-the-art unit -- that was one of two in the nation of its type to receive \$62.5 million in clean-coal tax credits from the U.S. Department of Energy. The intent of these incentives is to encourage advancements in U.S. coal plant efficiency and environmental technologies.

The modernized Cliffside facility will double energy output, while emitting one-half the mercury, one-third the nitrogen oxides and one-seventh the sulfur dioxide of the current plant. The project, combined with a minimum annual investment of \$50 million in energy efficiency, enables us to shut down 800 megawatts of older coal units in North Carolina - - further reducing our emissions.

North Carolina is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, and Duke Energy must serve 40,000 to 60,000 new customers each year in the Carolinas. In addition to the Cliffside modernization and our energy efficiency efforts, we are pursuing renewable energy and planning to build advanced natural gas and nuclear plants to meet this demand as cleanly as possible.

Over the past two years, I have traveled across the Carolinas to meet with our customers, community leaders and elected officials. I consistently hear that they expect us to make long-term investments to meet their power needs as cleanly and efficiently as possible. They are pleased that we are investing \$2 billion as a part of the Clean Smokestacks Act to install "scrubbers" on our largest coal plants, which represent about 90 percent of our coal generation, substantially reducing sulfur dioxide, mercury and particulate emissions. They have also been pleased when they hear that the Cliffside modernization enables us to retire the smaller coal plants that are not economical to scrub.

The elected officials in Cleveland and Rutherford counties, where Cliffside is located, have studied our project and voice near universal support for our plans. The Cliffside plant has operated in their community for more than 60 years. They know our Cliffside team and have worked with our regulators to understand the environmental facts.

The North Carolina Utilities Commission approved the project last March and we look forward to receiving our air permit from the state shortly. The project has undergone one of the most extensive environmental reviews of any project in the state's history, and we look forward to moving ahead.

I have lived in North Carolina for more than 30 years and raised three children in Charlotte. When Duke Energy's leaders make decisions to build major power plants,

they are both business and personal decisions. We take the long view and make these investments on behalf of future generations.

Our Cliffside project and comprehensive energy plan for North Carolina builds on that tradition, improves the environment and supplies the energy we need to maintain and grow our economy.