

**From:** Karen O Hodges  
**Sent:** Monday, February 3, 2020 1:38 PM  
**To:** Statements  
**Subject:** Statement of Position Submitted by Karen O Hodges

## Statement of Position Submitted

### Name

Karen O Hodges

### Email

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### Docket

E-7 Sub1214

### Message

RE: Docket No. E-7 Sub 1214 Dear North Carolina Utilities Commission members: I attended the Charlotte hearing of your Commission this past week (January 30) and did not speak on record but, if it's possible for you to accept my comments on the proposed Duke Energy rate hike now, I would like to submit them at this time: I listened to the entire roster of speakers at this hearing, strongly agreed with their virtually unanimous opposition to the rate hike, and found their specific arguments that Duke and its shareholders shouldn't be rewarded for mismanaging their business quite compelling. (Only one speaker said she could be in favor of the rate hike. She was motivated by alarm at the very serious health risks associated with Duke's handling of coal ash, which is understandable, but she did not seem to take into account Duke's capacity to cover the costs of proper disposal of the coal ash out of its own current financial resources.) What can I add from my own individual perspective? I would like to share two facts about ways in which I and my family have been directly affected by global warming – not as some far distant or purely theoretical prospect, but already over the past few years. At the end of my comments I will come back to the issue of the proposed rate hike. In 2008, Charlotte experienced heavy flooding. Our home was not in the flood plain as defined at that time, so we had not purchased flood insurance. But we sit at a low point on our block, and flood water completely destroyed our HVAC unit, rising to within inches of our interior flooring. It cost us something like \$10,000 to replace that indispensable HVAC unit, and more thousands to better prepare our crawl space for the next heavy rains, including installation of a top-of-the-line sump pump. That pump has since worked overtime to save us from damage during the rains that have become increasingly heavy and frequent over the past 12 years. Without it, I doubt we could remain at this location. To help with this, the Small Business Administration extended loans to us and to our neighbors (some of whom lost their homes altogether during this 2008 event), and the city built a large weir to improve drainage on our property. We appreciated this help but – think about it – all of this entailed significant expense to those taxpayer-funded government agencies, over and above the \$10,000+ out of our own pockets. Then multiply that by all the homes in our neighborhood that were affected. That's just a sample of the kind of infrastructure expense that global warming will inevitably subject us to. Duke Energy argues that moving immediately to renewable energy is impractical because fossil fuels give us the cheap-enough energy we need at present. Do

they factor into that calculation the kind of expenses we suffered from just one severe weather event? Of course not. Our family is not wealthy. We took a big hit from the flooding, but we managed. And climate change may not cause us personally the kind of real human suffering that is to come – is already coming - from global warming: not only severe weather events, not only fires, coastal erosion, and agricultural failures, but also social chaos as climate refugees desperately try to find places where they can survive. Now in the last quarter of my life, I may never be severely affected by any disaster that is unequivocally and transparently attributable to climate change. But as a citizen and taxpayer, as a person of faith, or simply as a human being, I want no part in contributing to this grim future. I think about this whenever I pay monthly Duke Energy bills for my home and my office space. I feel frustration and anger about the fact that I'm trapped by my basic need for energy, together with Duke's position as a monopoly. Each time I write those checks, I am forced to become part of the problem, not the solution. Here's another example of how we see global warming here and now in our own backyard: We have a little quince tree that typically blooms around March 15th. This year it bloomed in the middle of January, two whole months early. What does this mean for food production in our region? I'm not a farmer, but I'm an avid gardener, and I know that this represents an extreme disruption of seasonal patterns. Such an extreme change presents the ecosystem with severe challenges that have consequences both predictable and unpredictable, both near-term and far-distant. Ecosystem collapse is a complicated topic involving many unknowns, but we mustn't be naïve about it. Make no mistake, the health of our agriculture will suffer, right here in North Carolina as well as around the world. And that too is an economic factor that Duke Energy fails to factor into its mantra about the need for natural gas as a supposedly cheap energy source. It's difficult for me to understand how Duke Energy continues to downplay what a crisis we're actually facing in global warming. It's hard not to assume bad faith there. And particularly troubling is their claim, so aggressively promoted through slick advertising, that natural gas is "clean" and plays a necessary role in getting us to a more sustainable form of energy production. This is a lie. And Duke Energy must know it, because their leadership has at least as much access as I do to state-of-the-art climate science. They can, for example, read the work of Drew Shindell, a physicist, climate specialist, and distinguished professor at Duke University. Dr. Shindell has joined the chorus of those pointing out dangers associated with natural gas, most notably, the methane leakage which inevitably accompanies the fracking, transport, and use of natural gas. Methane is so far from being "clean" that getting our energy needs met by natural gas itself contributes very significantly to global warming. "Lie" is a very harsh word and I don't like to use it. I don't want to pass judgment on the many Duke employees who do their job diligently and competently. But there is something terribly wrong with Duke Energy at the level of leadership. And who will hold this corporation, the third largest energy provider on the planet, accountable for the massively large-scale consequences of their actions? In this state, given their monopoly status, only you, the NC Utilities Commission, can hope to do so. The ultimate solution may be a restructuring that removes financial incentives for Duke Energy to proceed as they have in the past. But, for now, an obvious point of leverage is to deny them the rate hike they have requested, ostensibly to help with the urgent coal ash clean-up now (at long last) legally required by law, ignoring the fact that this is their own responsibility, not that of consumers. Bailing out Duke Energy will only add to their ability to advertise "clean" natural gas, to lobby politicians, and to profit from what are predicted to become stranded assets in the future. Please use your full authority not to allow this to happen. Thank you for allowing the public to attend your hearings and for considering my views, Respectfully submitted on February 3, 2020 by Karen O. Hodges, Ph.D. 2641 Palm Avenue, Charlotte