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# Poll: Change in paying for nuclear plants opposed

**Survey commissioned by critics of utilities' proposal to simplify rate hikes.**

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Most N.C. voters would oppose legislation making it simpler for utilities to raise rates to pay for new nuclear power plants while they're still under construction, says a poll commissioned by opponents.

A coalition of 13 groups representing retirees, environmentalists, anti-nuclear forces, physicians and the faith community, called Consumers Against Rate Hikes, released the poll Wednesday.

Duke Energy plans to build an \$11 billion nuclear plant near Gaffney, S.C. Its partner in a pending merger, Raleigh's Progress Energy, also has nuclear plans.

Both say they first need N.C. legislation allowing them to recover financing costs without going through exhaustive rate cases. The change is needed to reassure investors that their money will be recovered and to reduce the overall costs of the projects, the utilities say.

The coalition's statewide poll of 600 likely voters referred to the proposed change as "minimal public oversight and regulatory review." Seventy percent said they would not support the change, 17 percent said they would and 12 percent were undecided. The poll has a 4 percent margin of error.

Sixty percent of those polled said new power plants are needed in the Carolinas; 31 percent disagreed. Asked if regulations make it too hard for utilities to build new plants, 48 percent said no and 40 percent yes.

Seventy-five percent said they fear rate hikes would unfairly hurt seniors.

"We believe that it is unacceptable for the general public to support risks that stockholders and bankers are unwilling to assume," Kathy Shea, executive director of coalition supporter N.C. Interfaith Power & Light, said in a statement. "Increasing the burden on our citizens with an annual rate hike is fundamentally unfair, inappropriate at best and foolish or worse."

Duke's own polling shows support for replacing old power plants and building a new nuclear plant. A poll of 1,100 Carolinas residents last September found that 77 percent support paying financing

costs for new plants during construction, instead of when they're finished.

"North Carolina has a robust regulatory process, which requires review and approval by the N.C. Utilities Commission for any costs to customers," spokeswoman Betsy Alley Conway said.

Republican-aligned Hill Research Consultants of The Woodlands, Texas, and the Democratic firm of Lauer Johnson Research of Baton Rouge, La., conducted the coalition poll on Feb. 7-10.

Consumers Against Rate Hikes is supported by AARP North Carolina, Action NC, Alliance for NC SAVE\$ ENERGY, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, Clean Water for North Carolina, N.C. Fair Share, N.C. Housing Coalition, N.C. Interfaith Power & Light, N.C. Justice Center, N.C. League of Conservation Voters, NC WARN, Nuclear Information & Resource Service and Western N.C. Physicians for Social Responsibility.



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