Duke hoping for climate change laws sooner than later

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Duke Energy, the third largest electric power holding company in the nation, is not about to get caught in the politically tainted debate on climate change.

However, the Fortune 500 Company made it clear this week that it wants climate-change legislation on the books as soon as possible.

That was the message delivered by Tom Williams, Duke's energy policy communication director, to representatives of seven chamber of commerce organizations from Oconee and Pickens counties at the World of Energy.

Echoing the same message that Duke Energy CEO Jim Rogers delivered to President Obama at a White House meeting a few months ago, Williams said the sooner legislation is enacted,

> **'We want to** know what the rules of the road are.'
>
> **Tom Williams**
> Duke Energy policy communication director

the sooner the company can invest in new energy technologies that would help cut carbon emissions and reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels. He said Duke Energy plans to invest $25 billion over the next five years, and having climate-change laws on the books is critical in determining the company's future capital investments.

"We want to know what the rules of the road are," Williams told the joint-chamber crowd.

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Williams said it's no longer a matter of if, but rather when, new climate-change regulations are implemented.

That's the same message U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-Seneca, delivered to a group of South Carolina electric cooperative leaders and state energy policy makers late last year.

Graham said that should Congress fail to pass an energy law, the alternative would be to have the federal Environmental Protection Agency regulating emissions instead. He said the EPA would be energy providers' worst nightmare if the agency took control of carbon reform.

In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that carbon dioxide, a so-called greenhouse gas blamed for climate change and global warming, is a pollutant than can be regulated by the EPA, if Congress does not act first to set emissions standards.

In the meantime, Williams said older coal power plants would continue to be retired throughout the country. He projected a map of the United States showing that almost 50 percent of the electricity used in the country comes from coal.

Williams said Duke could generate power using renewable sources of energy, such as wind or solar, but it would be up to communities to decide what they want.

For instance, Williams said there has been talk of harnessing wind energy in the Outer Banks of North Carolina, but whether people want those rows of big windmills dotting the landscape in a tourist area is another story.

However, Williams said Duke Energy recently got a boost from the Obama Administration's decision that nuclear power plants are a necessary investment. Obama announced last week more than $8 billion in federal loan guarantees to build the first nuclear power plants in three decades.

The loans open the way for groundbreaking of two new nuclear reactors in Burke, Ga. Obama said more federal funds would become available to finance nuclear facilities across the nation that would help create jobs.

Williams said Duke Energy, which operates the Oconee Nuclear Station built in the 1960s, should have permits in place for its new nuclear plant in Cherokee County in the Upstate by 2013.

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Victoria Black, left, with the help of Sandra McGee, tries out a new interactive energy efficient display at the World of Energy Friday afternoon.

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