

March 17th, 2010

Chancellor Holden Thorp
University of North Carolina
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CC: Mr. Tim Toben, Trustee Alston Gardner, Ms. Molly Diggins, Ms. Elinor Benami, Ms. Mary Cooper, Dr. Pete Andrews, Dr. John Cooper, Dr. Jonathan Howes, Dr. David McNelis, Dr. Royce Murray

Dear Chancellor Holden Thorp,

We write first and foremost to applaud your creation of the Energy Task Force to address energy use on campus and to express our gratitude towards the seriousness and receptiveness with which you have responded to the student-led campaign to move UNC away from coal.

We also would like to commend the continued leadership in sustainability Carolina has taken under your auspices. In the past year you have helped UNC to secure a \$17.5 million grant from the federal stimulus package to launch a solar fuels research center, initiated a pilot project with Duke Energy to develop coastal wind production, and released a plan outlining how UNC will achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

With all of this said, we also believe that Carolina has the potential and the responsibility to do better.

We know you are well aware of the public health and environmental consequences of mining and burning coal. UNC continues to burn over 100 thousand tons of coal every year in the cogeneration facility. This coal is mined in Appalachian Virginia, a region that has seen destructive mining practices that pose a serious ethical concern.

Moreover burning coal was responsible for 63% of campus greenhouse gas emissions in 2008. Dr. James Hansen highlighted in his visit to campus that developed nations must phase off of coal emissions by 2020, and that if universities are to take the lead they should phase off of coal well before then. Burning coal also emits chemicals like mercury, arsenic, lead, and particulate matter, among other substances that put the health of local residents at risk.

In addition, around 35,000 tons of coal ash is produced by the cogeneration plant each year, which is then used as structural fill and as an additive to fertilizer. This method of disposing coal ash is not regulated by the EPA and, as such, there is a risk that hazardous chemicals from the coal ash leach into groundwater supplies without our knowledge.

There are many alternatives to coal that can and should be further explored, such as biomass, as well as solar, wind, and geothermal energy. Natural gas could be used as a bridge fuel while we transition to these renewable sources of energy. While there are many unanswered questions about the feasibility of these alternative energy sources, we feel that if any university is able to meet such a challenge, it is Carolina. If any region is able to deliver a renewable energy solution to burning coal, it is right here in the Research Triangle.

Other Universities have already committed to moving beyond coal. Duke University stated a goal of reducing coal consumption 70% in 2009, by switching to a mix of natural gas and biofuels. University of Wisconsin-Madison confirmed plans to switch their 5 boilers to a mixture of biomass and natural gas by 2012. And Cornell University has made a commitment to be coal-free by 2011.

The Climate Action Plan submitted in September of 2009 includes plans to replace 20% of coal with biomass by 2025 at the cogeneration facility; this is a step in the right direction. Under the current timeline, however, Carolina will still be burning coal when current students' children or even their grandchildren attend UNC.

Thus we ask that you lead Carolina forward and maintain its status as an innovator and a leader. We ask you make a commitment to stop burning coal as soon as feasibly possible, by 2015 at the latest.

Sincerely,

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