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The Southeast Needs a Rapid Investment in Renewable Energy Technologies, Not New Nuclear Power Plants

Statement of Melissa Kemp, Policy Analyst of Public Citizen's Energy Program

The Southeast should invest in renewable energy technologies to meet its energy needs instead of building new nuclear power plants in the region. According to a new analysis by Public Citizen based on the work of governments, universities and other organizations in the United States, Europe and Japan, it is technically and economically feasible for a diverse mix of existing renewable technologies to completely meet U.S. energy needs over the coming decades. Clean, safe renewable energy sources – such as wind, solar, advanced hydroelectric and some types of biomass and geothermal energy – are central to dealing with these issues.

The analysis finds that renewable resources are vast, that difficulties related to their intermittency and variability can be overcome, and that renewable technologies can reliably generate as much energy as conventional fuels without significant carbon emissions, destructive mining or the production of radioactive waste. Under this scenario, electricity demand could be met completely by renewable energy in the near term, and transportation could be fueled by these clean energy sources in the long term.

Nuclear power, on the other hand, is not a clean or safe technology. New nuclear reactors have been proposed at 11 sites in the Southeast, but building new nuclear power plants would not solve our environmental, public health or energy problems. Nuclear power generates radioactive waste, which remains dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years, brings the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation and reactor accidents, and involves uranium mining that contaminates groundwater and burdens local communities. In fact, this month marks the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, which released radioactive material over Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and ultimately the entire globe in 1986. Many people – especially children – are still suffering from this accident. Nuclear reactors are also expensive and slow to build, which further reduces their potential for rapidly addressing climate change.

As the Southern Energy Network, a student coalition from across the Southeast promoting the use of renewable energy and improved energy efficiency, holds its third annual conference in Knoxville, Tenn., this weekend, Public Citizen urges citizens across the Southeast to resist the building of new nuclear reactors in their communities and to demand renewable energy technologies that can truly protect public health and bring long-term prosperity.

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For more information on the Public Citizen Energy Program, please see <http://www.citizen.org/cmep/>.
For Public Citizen's recent analysis of renewable energy, please see <http://www.citizen.org/documents/RenewableEnergy.pdf>.

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