It’s the latest edition of the MountainTrue Raleigh Report. In this week’s edition...Budget negotiations stop, start and stop again, Clean Power Plan response gets dirty; what’s DENR stand for; and more Duke disasters.

**Budget Blues**

Last week the House and Senate leadership made significant progress on a budget deal – sort of – when they reached an agreement on the total figure for the budget -- $21.74 billion. You may recall that the House included $800M more in its budget than the Senate did in its budget. The $21.74 billion number is closer to the Senate’s budget spending than the House’s, but it’s an important step toward a final budget deal, as it settles the question of how big the overall budget pie will be.

The middle of this week, House and Senate leaders announced they had reached agreement on raises and bonuses for teachers and state employees and on sub-committee spending targets (like Education, Health and Human Service, Justice and Public Safety, etc).

That's the good news. The bad news is that they still couldn't get their work done before the end of August.

What does all this mean in the real world? For starters, The Honorables have approved yet another “Continuing Resolution” to keep government going until September 18th while they work. The fact that the two sides have settled on an overall budget number that is closer to the Senate’s than the House’s also means that there will be less funding for all government services, including conservation. That has those of us who were encouraged by the proposed expanded investments in the state’s trust funds for clean water and parks worried that these funds are at now at risk.

**Clean Power Plan Gets Dirty**

[Attorney General Roy Cooper](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5ae/793787327/VEsE/) recently wrote legislators, urging them to abandon their efforts to sue the EPA over the Clean Power Plan and instead develop a plan to comply. "Although this legislation poses constitutional questions, I am even more concerned that this action will risk North Carolina's well-deserved reputation for protecting the quality of our air, recruiting businesses that produce cutting-edged technologies and offering leadership around the world on energy issues," Cooper wrote.

DENR Secretary Donald van der Vaart didn’t take too kindly to Cooper’s warnings and responded with his own [editorial](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5af/793787327/VEsF/). “The attorney general would have North Carolina throw tax dollars at yet another EPA rule that could very well be overturned,” he wrote. “Extended legal battles against the Clean Power Plan are inevitable. It would be wise for North Carolina to wait for a final judicial ruling before spending scarce public resources.”  Of course, DENR does not at all seem to mind spending scarce public resources on a lawsuit to challenge the CPP.

Despite the war of words, the legislation related to the CPP, H571, is still awaiting response from the Senate.

On the good news front…A recent poll by [Public Policy Polling](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5a0/793787327/VEsC/) showed that 63% of voters in North Carolina support the EPA's Clean Power Plan and only 29% are opposed to it. Even 49% of Republicans support the Clean Power Plan.

**What Does DENR Stand For?**

Speaking of DENR, there has been more [rumbling](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5a2/793787327/VEsD/) recently that perhaps the agency is not focused on protecting our environment and natural resources. The latest concerns have been fueled by DENR’s opposition to the Clean Power Plan, as well as its work to promote offshore drilling. In a recent [editorial](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5a4/793787327/VEsA/) in the Wilmington Star-News, Secretary van der Vaart said revenue sharing from offshore drilling could generate as much as $4 billion for North Carolina and create 55,000 jobs by 2035.

Adding more fuel to the fire, [DENR recently asked the courts to put coal ash cases against Duke on hold](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5a6/793787327/VEsB/). The cases resulted from DENR’s own enforcement actions over coal ash practices at 10 power plans. The agency now says the cleanups should be determined by the state Coal Act Management Act, not the courts, despite Duke’s proposal to employ the highest and best cleanup method – excavation – at several coal ash sites.  MountainTrue and other environmental groups that are parties to the litigation support Duke’s proposals and oppose DENR’s request to put the cases on hold.

**More Duke Disasters**

Since we are on the topic of Duke Energy, join our latest [effort](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5b8/793787327/VEsO/) to put a stop to Duke’s expansion plans in WNC.  Duke's plans for a “modernization” plan with massive transmission lines and a super-sized natural gas plant are flat-out wrong for our foothills and mountains.

In more Duke news, [residential solar installers recently asked Duke Energy CEO Lynn Good](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5ba/793787327/VEsP/) to support legislation to extend North Carolina’s solar tax credits. Unfortunately, the company is refusing to get involved. That’s why you should! [Join our ongoing efforts](http://action.mountaintrue.org/page/m/-3c19c9a0/59bb8baf/25f1b9e0/2119f5bc/793787327/VEsHBQ/) to urge legislators to extend the solar tax credits and support energy freedom.

Keep watching our Twitter feed and the #MTRaleigh hashtag for more news on the General Assembly and WNC!