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Gov. Bev Perdue calls for more nuclear businesses in N.C.

Charlotte Business Journal by John Downey, Senior Staff Writer

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Gov. [Bev Perdue](#) invited nuclear industry executives to move operations to North Carolina, and Progress Energy CEO [Bill Johnson](#) predicted a strong future for the industry as the Nuclear Energy Assembly wrapped up today in Charlotte.

Johnson was the last speaker at the conference, which attracted more than 600 participants to The Westin Charlotte. Johnson is chairman of the **Nuclear Energy Institute**, the industry association that organized the three-day event.

He acknowledged that, in the near term, construction of nuclear plants will be more modest than had been expected just a few years ago.

Overseas boom

The construction of new reactors at Southern Co.'s Plant Vogtle and SCANA's V.C. Summer plant are important milestones, he said. Still, there is less need for the large-scale base-load plants, given the sluggish growth in demand following the 2008 recession, he said. For now, most power-plant construction is likely to go to natural gas facilities, considering the "abnormally low" price for the fuel now.

And Johnson said regulatory issues — from plant permitting to the uncertainty over carbon regulation — are also hampering the industry in the United States.

The industry will turn to a boom in nuclear construction overseas while it waits for the domestic market for nuclear plants to recover, he said. Johnson expects that to be well under way by 2020.

"That time is coming," he said. "Because the long-term fundamentals for new nuclear power are still sound."

Recruiting businesses

Johnson said regional partnerships among utilities "will be fundamental to future nuclear expansion." Progress and proposed merger partner Duke Energy are both in talks to buy up to a 10% interest in the Summer plant.

Perdue praised the industry's role in providing affordable energy, which she called key to North Carolina's economy. She also put in a good word for the proposed merger. She said state and federal regulators still have to weigh in on their issues, but said "this merger would be a huge crown in North Carolina's economic-development platform."

She said being the home to the largest investor-owned utility in the United States would help to recruit new businesses to the state. And she said that was a big part of her purpose for speaking to the conference.

"I wouldn't be doing my job very well if I didn't tell you ... I also came to talk to you about doing business in North Carolina," she said. "I'm shameless. I admit that."

John Downey covers the energy industry and public companies for the Charlotte Business Journal.