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Clean Power Plan's demise is welcome news

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Administrator Scott Pruitt has announced the Environmental Protection Agency will abandon the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan. While the plan has already done damage, all who think agencies should follow the law and that policy should generate net benefit should still welcome its end.

The Clean Power Plan sought to reduce national power production emissions to 1985 levels by 2030 even as the U.S. population was simultaneously expected to increase 53 percent. This was supposedly done to combat man-made global warming.

The plan's mandates would force closure of many existing coal plants and shift generation to natural gas, wind power or solar. The associated consumer expense was significant, and logistical realities were ignored.

Federal agencies are supposed to do cost-benefit analyses for major regulations. In the world of the EPA, however, the costs imposed by regulations are very real, but the benefits are less so. This is because the agency produces “social costs” estimates, theorizing potential future savings from a world that is slightly less warm. (The EPA estimated the Clean Power Plan would reduce global temperatures by a whopping 0.013 degrees Celsius by the year 2100.)

And when it comes to global warming, projected benefits are especially suspect. As Jason Scott Johnston, an adjunct scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute, noted in 2016, “A quick look at historical time series data does not suggest that rising average surface temperature has been accompanied by aggregate economic harm.”

In other words, there is no real-world evidence suggesting there will be genuine net future costs associated with global warming, which makes it very difficult to “save” money by avoiding them.

The system is rigged to declare almost any regulation a net “benefit” regardless of negative economic impact. Yet the EPA further stacked the deck. While all associated costs would be borne by U.S. citizens, the estimated (and likely imaginary) benefits were calculated on a global basis. So Americans would pay more for power but get only a fraction of even theoretical benefits.

The Trump administration plans to end use of global benefit estimates. That alone could eliminate tens of billions of dollars of the CPP's “benefits,” and result in somewhat more realistic cost-benefit analysis.

The Clean Power Plan appears to violate federal law in other ways, but the biggest reason to File 13 the plan is this: The public doesn't support it. While polls may show public concern about global warming, they seldom show support for increased consumer costs or tolerating lower quality of life to address the issue.

As a National Review editorial noted, “The American people, through their elected representatives, have had many opportunities to limit carbon dioxide emissions in the hopes of mitigating climate change. Congress has considered the question and declined to do so.” Furthermore, 27 states challenged the Clean Power Plan in court.

Outside a few liberal enclaves, the voting public isn't electing people to pursue global warming fanaticism. The Clean Power Plan was a likely illegal, jury-rigged attempt to do an end-run around the democratic process in pursuit of objectives that are economically destructive and environmentally meaningless. That's a long list of reasons to cheer the plan's demise.