

## Even the EPA says Obama carbon plan will only marginally affect climate change, Scott Walker says

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When the second Republican presidential debate took up climate change, Gov. Scott Walker made a counterintuitive claim about President Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan, which requires the nation's power plants to reduce their carbon emissions by nearly a third.

About midway into the Sept. 16, 2015 debate, held in California, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida was expressing concerns to moderator Jake Tapper about higher utility rates and fewer jobs.

That's when Walker interjected and said:

"A lot of those people, though, and I'm going to echo what Senator Rubio just said. This is an issue where, we're talking about my state, it's thousands of manufacturing jobs. Thousands of manufacturing jobs for a rule the Obama administration, (its) own EPA has said will have a marginal impact on climate change."

Walker's campaign confirmed to us that the governor was referring to the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, and to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. There are differences of opinion, of course, over how much one plan in one country can affect the global climate.

But to Walker's claim:

Did the EPA -- the agency administering the Clean Power Plan -- say the plan's regulations would have only a marginal effect on climate change?

### **The plan**

In August 2015, the Obama administration announced that its Clean Power Plan regulations would require power plants to reduce carbon emissions, from 2005 levels, by 32 percent by 2030.

(A 2014 draft of the plan had sought a 30 percent reduction.)

Advocates said the reduction would help attack global warming and provide reductions in other emissions that create soot and smog. But the announcement prompted Walker to add Wisconsin to states that are challenging the first-ever requirements in court.

The reductions won't be uniform, because individual states rely on different mixes of coal, natural gas, nuclear energy, water, wind and the sun to provide power. Wisconsin, which has traditionally relied heavily on coal, faces having to reduce emissions 34 percent-- the sixth-highest rate in the country, according to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

#### **EPA's view**

As for the EPA, it has described the Clean Power Plan as a necessary, though not sufficient, step in addressing climate change -- and as part of a larger strategy to spur other nations to reduce emissions.

During a July 2015 congressional hearing, U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith, chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, challenged EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy on the impact on climate change.

The Texas Republican quoted a former EPA assistant secretary under Obama as saying the plan would, at most, reduce the global temperature by 1/100 of a degree Celsius.

McCarthy responded by saying that the value of the plan can't be measured that way. She said that while the plan mandates carbon emission reductions in the United States, it also aims to prod other nations to reduce their emissions and to trigger investment in technological innovations that also will reduce emissions.

The value of the plan is "in showing strong domestic action, which can actually trigger global action," McCarthy said. "(I'm) not disagreeing that this action in and of itself will not make all the difference we need to address climate action. But what I'm saying is if don't take action domestically, we will never get started."

(Separately, EPA spokeswoman Liz Purchia told us the agency has said the Clean Power Plan "is only one component of our larger strategy," which includes measures for vehicle fuel efficiency and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.)

During the same hearing, there were fears expressed that the plan will drive up the cost of electricity to consumers. And U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., expressed concern that China, India and Russia would not reduce the growth in their carbon emissions.

So, the head of the EPA acknowledges that the Clean Power Plan -- since it applies only to the United States -- can have only a limited impact on global climate change.

But besides reducing carbon emissions in the United States, the plan is aimed at getting other nations to do the same.

#### **Other views**

We interviewed two experts about the Clean Power Plan and the EPA's take on it: Adele Morris of the Brookings Institution's Climate and Energy Economics Project, and Chip Knappenberger of the Cato Institute's Center for the Study of Science.

Both agreed that the United States historically is a major emitter of carbons, but growing nations such as India and China will play a larger role in future emissions.

And they agreed that a key part of the EPA's strategy with the Clean Power Plan is that as a global leader, if the United States reduces emissions, other nations might be spurred to do so, as well. Other experts have made the same point.

"This appears to be an intentionally obfuscating perspective," Dallas Burtraw, a senior fellow at Resources for the Future a think tank that tracks energy policy, said of Walker's claim. "Climate change is a global problem. The contribution of U.S. efforts are greater, in my mind, for the influence they have on the behavior of the other nations of the world than for the specific reductions that the U.S. achieves. The greater contribution is leadership in this case."

In June 2015 -- five months before a United Nations summit meeting aimed at forging a global accord to cut climate-warming emissions -- China submitted a plan to the U.N. detailing how it plans to reduce fossil fuel emissions by 2030. The New York Times reported that climate policy experts cited the significance of China's plan, given that the United States and China -- the world's top greenhouse gas polluters -- have long been viewed as the biggest obstacles to reaching a meaningful global warming deal.

### **Our rating**

In the debate, Walker said the Obama administration's "own Environmental Protection Agency" has said its Clean Power Plan "will have a marginal impact on climate change."

The EPA acknowledges that the plan can have only a limited effect on global climate change, given that they order reductions in carbon emission only in the United States. But a key aim of the plan is to spur other nations to reduce their emissions, as well, and to spur new technologies that will help reduce emissions.

Walker's statement is partially accurate, but leaves out important details -- our definition of Half True.