

THE ORANGE COUNTY
REGISTER

Editorial: Climate change in the 'present'

May 6, 2014

John Paul Holdren, senior adviser to President Obama on science and technology, took a star turn Tuesday when he released the administration's third U.S. National Climate Assessment.

The document is "the most comprehensive and authoritative ever about how climate has been changing in the United States," said Mr. Holdren. It "confirms that climate change is not a distant threat," he added. "It is affecting the American people already."

But wait, said the White House science czar. President Obama is ready to roll out his climate action plan, which he originally outlined last June. It will spare the American people, Mr. Holdren suggested, from "the impacts of changes in climate that can longer be avoided."

The central goal of the president's plan is to ostensibly reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by mandating reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from burning coal, oil and gas.

Indeed, the Obama Environmental Protection Agency last September proposed a regulation strictly limiting carbon emissions of newly built coal-fired power plants. If unchanged, the regulation will all but ensure that no new coal plants are built in this country.

Meanwhile, President Obama tasked EPA with issuing draft regulations by June 1 limiting emissions by existing coal-burning power plants, a third (or more) of which potentially could be shut down.

As to oil, the State Department last month put on indefinite hold on a decision as to whether to approve the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, which would deliver 800,000 barrels of crude daily from Hardisty, Alberta, to refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

In March, EPA issued a new regulation requiring oil refiners to install expensive new equipment to remove sulfur from gasoline. The requirement will not only raise the cost of oil refining by billions of dollars, it also will drive up the cost of gasoline, which already has increased 100 percent under Mr. Obama.

The Obama administration insists that its expensive new requirements imposed upon the nation's coal plants and oil refineries, and its delay in making a decision on Keystone XL, are driven by sound science and meant to reduce the threat climate change poses to the health and well-being of the American people.

EPA claims its emissions standards for new coal-fired plants will save up to 34,000 lives per year, while also preventing 15,000 heart attacks and 400,000 cases of asthma. It similarly claims its requirement that oil refineries produce sulfur-free gasoline will prevent up to 2,000 premature deaths and 2,200 hospital visits.

One needn't be a climate change "denier" to question those dubious claims. Indeed, Cato Institute's Paul Knappenberger and Patrick Michaels noted that the Obama administration's National Climate Assessment predicts more heat-related deaths because of climate change. But that flies in the face of findings of studies that have concluded the exact opposite.

That includes research by a team lead by Jennifer Bobb, of the Harvard School of Public Health, which found that the risk of dying from excessive heat in the U.S. was declining.

It stands to reason that, if the administration's supposed "comprehensive and authoritative" assessment on U.S. climate change is wrong on heat-related deaths, other of the document's claims may be wrong as well.

That's why we cannot help but conclude that the Obama administration's determination to regulate coal plants and gasoline production, and to delay approval of the Keystone pipeline, is driven more by politics and less by impartial science.