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## Obama fiddles on regulations

By [Jennifer Rubin](#)

President Obama's regulatory czar Cass Sunstein pens an op-ed in the [Wall Street Journal](#) touting some adjustments in federal regulations:

We have already achieved a great deal. Significant burden-reducing rules have been finalized or publicly proposed by the Department of Labor, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Transportation — and they are expected to save more than \$4 billion over the next five years. . . .

The reforms announced today span a wide range:

- The Department of Health and Human Services will soon propose to remove unnecessary regulatory and reporting requirements now imposed on hospitals and other health-care providers, potentially saving \$4 billion over the next five years.
- The Department of Labor is finalizing a rule to simplify and improve hazard warnings for workers, likely saving employers more than \$2.5 billion over the next five years without compromising safety.
- The Department of Transportation is proposing a rule that will eliminate unnecessary regulation of the railroad industry, saving a total of \$340 million or more.
- The Environmental Protection Agency will soon propose a rule to reduce burdens on hazardous-waste generators by moving from paper-based to electronic reporting, saving up to \$126 million annually.
- By the end of this year, the Internal Revenue Service will eliminate 55 million hours in annual paperwork burdens by consolidating reporting requirements and streamlining various tax forms.

No, you will not see a rollback in the Dodd-Frank financial regulatory scheme. No, there's no freeze on implementation of Obamacare. And there is only the most minuscule adjustment in the impact of EPA's uber-regulations that impose billions in costs on American businesses.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who has been raising modest regulation as one of the keys to the economic boom in his state, thinks the White House hears footsteps. His spokesman, Ray Sullivan, tells me, "It sounds like once again President Obama is reacting to Governor Perry's strong entry into the race. The Obama administration's massive expansion of government and heavy-handed regulations have killed American jobs. Last week, Governor Perry called for a six-month moratorium on federal regulations to let small businesses and employers off the mat so they can create jobs."

Moreover, Obama is not addressing the gigantic regulatory schemes that are part and parcel of his big government agenda. [Majority Leader Rep. Eric Cantor \(R-Virg.\)](#) has put out a statement that reads in part:

"Today the White House announced the outcome of its government wide review, and the results are underwhelming. Every day, business people and job creators cope with burdensome regulations that have a negative impact on both jobs and our economy, and again the President seems reluctant to do everything in his power to help them. Speeches and editorials are not enough to help real job creators in America — small business owners — create middle-class jobs. Action is needed — which is why we must remove onerous federal regulations that are redundant, harmful to small businesses, and impede private sector investment and job creation.

"Next month, the House will continue our jobs focus and pursue a legislative agenda that boosts economic growth through reducing the regulatory and tax burden. We will make sure that Washington policies are less restrictive to businesses small and large by requiring a congressional review and approval of any proposed federal government regulation that will have a significant impact on the economy. Further, we will repeal the '3 percent withholding rule,' which serves as an unnecessary tax increase on those who do business with the

government, and overturn several of EPA's proposed regulations that inhibit jobs in areas as varied as cement and farm dust. We will stop the overreach of the National Labor Relations Board, and we will ensure a complete, publicly available analysis of the impact that regulations have on consumers and small businesses. These are common-sense steps that should be enacted on a bipartisan basis and I call upon the President to focus on unemployed people and middle-class job creation before politics and ideology, and he can start by working with us to tackle America's job crisis."

I asked Peter van Doren, the Cato Institute's senior fellow and editor of Regulation magazine, for his reaction. He said that "changes in the implementation of federal programs by agencies that will save money are welcome." However, this is hardly sufficient in his view. He contends that "these reforms to make government cheaper fail to ask more fundamental questions about what the role of government should be in the regulation of markets. We should not simply make the rules issued by the various departments less expensive but instead ask why do the departments exist in the first place. What is the evidence that markets fail and what is the evidence that government intervention actually improves the operation of those markets cost effectively?"

Even for those who do not wholeheartedly embrace the libertarian view, certainly lawmakers, business leaders and voters have grounds to question whether the costs of massive regulations (including lost job growth) outweigh the benefits, and whether we need to relook at the total burden (regulatory and tax) we are shoving onto employers. Fiddling around the edges of Obama's expansive regulatory schemes is hardly going to put the issue to bed.