



Democrats and Republicans Go Hard Against Biden Regulation

BUTLER, Pennsylvania — One of the most underreported crises in American culture is the collateral damage people and communities suffer from government overregulation. Just one little regulation can start a spiral that affects an entire community's ability to prosper and thrive, keep generations of families intact, or give students the tools they need to succeed.

In reaction, most politicians on both sides of the aisle traditionally do one of two things. Either they shrug but do nothing, or they have a press conference to point fingers at the opposing political parties — while still not doing much.



Salena Zito

For once, though, elected officials are doing better. Here, local congressional Democrats and Republicans have joined forces in both the U.S. Senate and the House, in both Pennsylvania and Ohio (and elsewhere), to halt a Biden Department of Energy rule that would force any business manufacturing electric distribution transformers to stop using grain-oriented steel cores and instead use amorphous metal.

The grain-oriented cores are used only by one company in the entirety of the United States, namely here at the Cleveland-Cliffs Butler Works. A rule outlawing use of those cores would cost more than 1,500 jobs here in Butler and at the company's other plant in Zanesville, Ohio, changing the lives and security of not just the people who work here but the thousands of other jobs and small businesses that support the plant.

This is an issue not just important to the men and women who work here and in Zanesville; it affects all of us. The distribution transformer is the most important cog in America's energy grid and in our energy supply chain.

The replacement the DOE is insisting on, amorphous steel, is produced here only in a limited supply. This means we would have to rely on imports from China, Japan and Vietnam to supply the steel for American energy needs. The supply chain for the already vulnerable U.S. electric grid, and thus national security, could be endangered by relying so heavily on imports from the other side of the planet, especially from a hostile power such as China.

Alas for the workers affected, the issue has received too little media attention to pressure decision-makers in the White House and at the Energy Department, who feel no urgency. Yet 20 years ago, even 10, a Democratic administration would have danced on hot coals to make this right.

Union leader Jamie Sychak is fighting hard, however. The president of the UAW Local 3303 is sitting in his office with his vice president, Ray Pflugh, financial secretary, Mark Earley, and contracting chairman, Steve Gilliland, in the building where the Pullman Standard railcar facility used to stand.



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“This was a steel mill that was known as the wheel works that made the steel railroad car wheels for Pullman Standard,” Sychak explained, referring to steel manufacturing in this same spot for more than 150 years.

Like the Cleveland Cliffs Butler Works, Pullman Standard funneled millions into the local Butler economy that paved the roads, bettered the schools and filled the bankrolls of local charities. According to historical data compiled by the Butler Historical Society, Pullman Standard manufactured more than 7 million artillery shells and bombs in addition to rail cars for the Allies and American forces in World War II. Post-war, it employed 4,000 people in both the factory and offices; when it closed in 1980, it crippled the local economy.

The historical society notes a Butler Eagle article dated Feb. 17, 1982, in which Mayor Fred Vero estimated a \$60 million loss to the county. School districts lost significant portions of their budgets; suppliers and contractors laid off employees. Approximately 2,000 jobs outside of Pullman Standard were lost due to the plant’s closure. County unemployment skyrocketed to 17.5% practically overnight. Census data shows that since that closure in 1982, the city of Butler has consistently lost significant percentages of the local population.

Pullman’s demise had to do with changing American habits. People no longer flocked to passenger trains for transportation. They used cars. That is not the case today with Butler Works. People across the country desperately depend on a reliable, affordable electrical grid. Killing the local plant would not be an organic side effect of changing habits but instead a government-created disaster, all in reaction to pressure from the Sierra Club and other heavily bankrolled and powerful climate justice entities.

Sychak said it was last March that his team was shown a draft letter about a rule proposal on efficiency standards for distribution transformers.

“We brought the letter back here, read it, and thought, ‘What is this all about?’” he said.

He deployed his whole union leadership team to decipher its effects. “There are seven us and we spent every waking moment researching this,” Sychak explained.

They were stunned by what they learned. The Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club and some others had sued the Department of Energy for not properly doing its customary six-year review of energy efficiency standards. That lawsuit started the collateral damage.

“They trumped-up this bogeyman theory they refer to as a social cost of greenhouse gas and put a financial, an astronomical financial price tag of potential liability on the DOE for not doing this,” he explained, saying the environmental groups’ theory is that the department’s failure to review would add trillions of dollars in costs to the world due to excess greenhouse gasses.

“It’s a crazy theory. It’s 1,240 pages. It’s nuts. Yeah, and they drag the study over 30 years to get some significance to the value,” he said.

Sychak grew up here right in the city of Butler. He went to school here, as did his father and his father’s father, and all of them worked in the steel plant. The grandfather of 10 credits its existence to keeping three out of his four children living in the area.

His colleague Ray Pflugh also grew up here in Butler County and has worked here for 24 years. His two adult sons are the third Pflugh generation to work here.

As for their colleague Gilliland, he is the third of four generations in his family who have worked here.

Sychak said he has met with the White House on this, but “we didn’t get anything definitive other than I



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felt that they genuinely listened to us while we were there.” Still, he has had no luck meeting, let alone getting any reply, from anyone from Secretary Granholm’s office.

He adds he is heartened that there is this rare moment in American politics that both sides have come together so succinctly to lean in and help them overturn this rule. Still, uncertainty reigns.

“We’ve seen this story play out in America over and over again. We’ve seen the impact it has on communities, churches, schools and families,” Sychak said. “I don’t want to be looking for a new job at 53.”

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