



Obama Planning New Carbon Curbs on Power Plants

In a move likely to renew debate over administration “end runs” around Congress, President Obama is preparing regulations to limit carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants, the *New York Times* [reported](#) Thursday. The administration has already taken steps to limit “greenhouse gas” emissions from newly built power plants, the paper noted, but imposing those limits on plants already built and operating will be far more expensive.



Legislation to limit the emissions has been stalled in Congress, but Heather Zichal, White House coordinator for energy and climate change, said the renewable power and energy efficiency requirements under consideration by the administration will not require legislative approval or congressional funding. The regulations would be promulgated by the Environmental Protection Agency, an administrative body created by executive order of President Nixon in 1970 and ratified by Congress later that year.

“The E.P.A. has been working very hard on rules that focus specifically on greenhouse gases from the coal sector,” Zichal told the *Times*. “They’re doing a lot of important work in that space.”

Apart from the constitutional issue regarding the separation of legislative and executive powers, Republicans have criticized Obama’s policy on climate change and the existing EPA regulations as obstacles to economic recovery. Even some Democrats who are “hawkish about climate action,” the *Times* noted, fear that new standards on power plants might come at the cost of higher energy prices and fewer jobs, particularly in the industrial Midwest, a region dependent on relatively inexpensive energy from coal. The new regulations are also likely to spark protests from coal-producing states such as Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

In a unanimous 2007 Supreme Court decision, the justices ruled in *Environmental Defense v. Duke Energy Corp* that the EPA has the power to impose emission standards under the broad authority granted the agency by Congress in the Clean Air Act. But when the executive branch moves unilaterally to impose restrictions that Congress has refused to pass, howls of protest are often heard on Capitol Hill, as happened when the EPA came out with [“cap and trade”](#) regulations in 2011.

Early the following year, a group of 16 prominent scientists and engineers issued a [statement](#) challenging the widespread notion that scientists are virtually unanimous in sounding the alarm over climate change and calling for drastic legislation to combat it. The signers, including World Federation of Science president Antonio Zichichi, said one reason for their lack of alarm is the absence of any evidence of global warming for the previous 10 years:

The lack of warming for more than a decade, indeed, the smaller-than-predicted warming over the 22 years since the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) began issuing projections, suggests that computer models have greatly exaggerated how much warming additional CO2 can cause. Faced with this embarrassment, those promoting alarm have shifted their drumbeat from warming to weather extremes, to enable anything unusual that happens in our



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chaotic climate to be ascribed to CO2.

Obama did, in fact, cite weather extremes in a [speech](#) in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, calling for “bold action” to slow the alleged warming of the planet.

“The grim alternative affects all nations: more severe storms, more famine and floods, new waves of refugees, coastlines that vanish, oceans that rise,” the president declared. “This is the global threat of our time.”

When last October’s “Superstorm” Sandy hit the East Coast, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York City were among those who attributed the harsh winds and drenching rains to man-made climate change.

“Anyone who says there’s not a dramatic change in weather patterns, I think is denying reality,” Cuomo [said](#) at the time. “What is clear is that the storms that we’ve experienced in the last year or so, around this country and around the world, are much more severe than before.”

“Several weeks ago, Superstorm Sandy gave us a preview of what to expect if climate change is not addressed,” Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) [said](#) in a video message to participants in last fall’s United Nations conference on global warming.

But Martin Hoerling, a meteorologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, offered a [different explanation](#) of Sandy’s wrath:

Great events can have little causes. In this case, the immediate cause is most likely little more than the coincidental alignment of a tropical storm with an extratropical storm. Both frequent the west Atlantic in October.... So, while it will rain like “black cats and Frankenweenies” over the mid-Atlantic, this is not some spell conjured upon us by great external forces.... unless you believe in the monster flicks of Universal Studios fame!

Citing what was then a new study in the journal *Nature*, science and environmental writer Andrew Revkin [wrote](#) in 2002:

Four times since the last ice age, at intervals roughly 3,000 years apart, the Northeast has been struck by cycles of storms far more powerful than any in recent times, according to a new study. The region appears to have entered a fifth era in which such superstorms are more likely, the researchers say.

Emissions from coal-burning power plants could hardly have been the cause of extreme weather patterns going back to the last ice age, but President Obama had promised long before Sandy’s arrival that he would promote environmental policies that would drive up the cost of energy. Early in his first campaign for the White House, then-Senator Obama [told](#) the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

Under my plan of a cap-and-trade system, electricity rates would necessarily skyrocket.... Coal-powered plants, you know, natural gas, you name it, whatever the plants were, whatever the industry was, they would have to retrofit their operations. That will cost money. They will pass that money on to consumers.

The economy will benefit “over the long term” through “more efficient energy usage and changing light bulbs and more efficient appliances, but also technology improving how we can produce clean energy,” Obama said in that January 2008 interview. Back then, he also [said](#) Congress and the American people would have to be sold on that idea.



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“The problem is, can you get the American people to say this is really important and force their representatives to do the right thing?” he said. Congress has yet to do the “right thing” by passing the administration’s proposals, but the president no longer sees that as a barrier to his ambitious energy plans.

“The president couldn’t get it done through legislation, so now he’s doing it through regulation, using our tax dollars to make it happen,” [pointed out](#) Oklahoma Republican Senator James Inhofe.

Obama administration efforts on behalf of the climate change agenda include working for a United Nations treaty requiring emission controls in the industrialized nations of the world. That effort, Inhofe charged, is not really about the environment.

“It’s about one thing: spreading the wealth around,” he declared, noting the point made in the following lead paragraph of an Associated Press [report](#) on the UN conference on climate change in Doha, Qatar, last November:

As nearly 200 countries meet in oil-and-gas-rich Qatar for annual talks starting Monday on slowing global warming, one of the main challenges will be raising climate aid for poor countries at a time when budgets are strained by financial turmoil.

President Obama, having presided over annual federal deficits of a trillion dollars and more, is familiar with the problem of strained budgets. But his solution to our own “financial turmoil” is energy prices that will “skyrocket.”

Photo of coal-fired Big Bend Power Station near Apollo Beach, Florida



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