

The Gruberization of environmental policies

Accumulation of fraudulent EPA regulations impacts energy, economy, jobs, families and health

Paul Driessen

Call it the Gruberization of America's energy and environmental policies.

Former White House medical consultant Jonathan Gruber pocketed millions of taxpayer dollars before infamously explaining how ObamaCare was enacted. "Lack of transparency is a huge political advantage," he said. "It was really, really critical to getting the bill passed." At least one key provision was a "very clever basic exploitation of the lack of economic understanding of the American voter."

The Barack Obama/Gina McCarthy Environmental Protection Agency is likewise exploiting its lack of transparency and most Americans' lack of scientific understanding. EPA bureaucrats and their hired scientists, pressure groups and PR flacks are getting rich and powerful by implementing costly, punitive, dictatorial regulations "for our own good," and pretending to be honest and publicly spirited.

EPA's latest regulatory onslaught is its "Clean Power Plan." The agency claims the CPP will control or prevent "dangerous manmade climate change," by reducing carbon dioxide and "encouraging" greater use of renewable energy. In reality, as even EPA acknowledges, no commercial-scale technology exists that can remove CO2 from power plant emission streams. The real goal is forcing coal-fired power plants to reduce their operations significantly or (better still) shut down entirely.

The agency justifies this by [deceitfully claiming](#) major health benefits will result from eliminating coal in electricity generation – and deceptively ignoring the harmful effects that *its regulations* are having on people's livelihoods, living standards, health and well-being. Its assertion that reducing the USA's coal-related carbon dioxide emissions will make an iota of difference is just as disingenuous. China, India and other fast-developing nations must keep burning coal to generate electricity and lift people out of poverty, and CO2 plays only a tiny (if any) role in climate change and destructive weather events.

The new CPP amplifies Obama Administration diktats targeting coal use. Companion regulations cover mercury, particulates (soot), ozone, "cross-state" air pollution, sulfur and nitrogen oxides that contribute to haze in some areas, and water quality. Their real benefits are minimal to illusory ... or fabricated.

American's air is clean, thanks to scrubbers and other emission control systems that remove the vast majority of pollutants. Remaining pollutants pose few real health problems. To get the results it needs, EPA cherry picks often questionable research that supports its agenda and ignores all other studies. It low-balls costs, pays advisors and outside pressure groups millions of dollars to support its decisions, and ignores the cumulative effects of its regulations on energy costs and thus on businesses, jobs and families.

Now, for the first time, someone has tallied those costs. The results are sobering.

An [exhaustive study](#) by Energy Ventures Analysis, Inc. tallies the overall effects of EPA regulations on the electric power industry and provides [state-by-state summaries](#) of the rules' impacts on residential, industrial and overall energy users. The study found that EPA rules and energy markets will inflict *\$284 billion per year* in extra electricity and natural gas costs in 2020, compared to its 2012 baseline year.

The typical household's annual electricity and natural gas bills will rise 35% or \$680 by 2020, compared to 2012, and will climb every year after that, as EPA regulations get more and more stringent. Median family incomes are already \$2,000 lower since President Obama took office, and electricity prices have soared 14-33% in states with the most wind power – so these extra costs will exact a heavy additional toll.

Manufacturing and other businesses will be hit even harder, the study concluded. Their electricity and natural gas costs will almost double between 2012 and 2020, increasing by nearly *\$200 billion annually* over this short period. Energy-intensive industries like aluminum, steel and chemical manufacturing will find it increasingly hard to compete in global markets, but all businesses (and their employees) will suffer.

The EVA analysis calculates that industrial electricity rates will soar by 34% in West Virginia, 59% in Maryland and New York, and a whopping 74% in Ohio. Just imagine running a factory, school district or hospital – and having to factor skyrocketing costs like that into your budget. Where do you find that extra money? How many workers or teachers do you lay off, or patients do you turn away? Can you stay open?

The CPP will also force utility companies to spend billions building new generators (mostly gas-fired, plus wind turbines), and new transmission lines, gas lines and other infrastructure. But EPA does not factor those costs into its calculations; nor does it consider the many years it will take to design, permit, engineer, finance and build those systems – and battle [Big Green lawsuits](#) over them.

How “science-based” are EPA’s regulations, really? Its [mercury rule](#) is based on computer-generated risks to [hypothetical American women](#) who eat 296 pounds of fish a year that they catch themselves, a claim that its rule will prevent a theoretical reduction in IQ test scores by an undetectable “0.00209 points,” and similar absurdities. Its [PM2.5 soot standard](#) is equivalent to having *one ounce* of super-fine dust spread equally in a volume of air one-half mile long, one-half mile wide and one story tall.

No wonder EPA has paid its “independent” Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee [\\$181 million](#) and the American Lung Association [\\$25 million](#) since 2000 to rubberstamp its secretive, phony “science.”

Rural America will really be walloped by the total weight of EPA’s anti-coal regulations. Nonprofit electricity cooperatives serve 42 million people in 47 states, across three-fourths of the nation’s land area. They own and maintain 42% of America’s electric distribution lines and depend heavily on coal. They have already invested countless billions retrofitting coal-fired generators with state-of-the-art emission control systems, and thus emit very few actual pollutants. (CO2 fertilizes plants; it is not a pollutant.)

EPA’s air and water rules will force these coal units to slash their electricity generation or close down long before their productive lives are over – and before replacement units and transmission lines can be built. Electricity rates in these rural areas are already higher than in urban areas, but will go much higher. Experts warn that these premature shutdowns will slash electricity “reserve margins” to almost zero in some areas, make large sections of the power grid unstable, and create high risks of rolling blackouts and cascading power outages, especially in the Texas panhandle, western Kansas and northern Arkansas.

The rules will thus put the cooperatives in violation of the Rural Electrification Act and 16 other laws that require reliable, affordable electricity for these far-flung communities. EPA’s actions are also putting rural hospitals in greater jeopardy, as they try to cope with “Affordable Care Act” rules and other burdens that have already caused numerous closings. As [USA Today reported](#), the shuttered hospitals mean some of the nation’s poorest and sickest patients will be denied accessible, affordable care – and people suffering strokes, heart attacks and accidents will not be able to reach emergency care during their “golden hour,” meaning many of them will die or be severely and permanently disabled.

EPA never bothered to consider any of these factors. Nor has it addressed the habitat, bird, bat and other [environmental impacts](#) that tens of thousands more wind turbines will have; the “[human health hazards](#)” that wind turbines have been shown to inflict on people living near them; or the high electricity costs, [notorious unreliability](#), and increased power grid instability associated with the wind and solar installations that EPA seems to think can quickly and magically replace the coal-based electricity it is eliminating.

Congress, state legislators and attorneys general, governors and courts need to stop these secretive, duplicitous, dictatorial Executive Branch actions. Here’s one thought. Heartland Institute Science Director Jay Lehr helped organize the panel that called for establishing the Environmental Protection Agency. In a [persuasive analysis](#), he says it’s time now to systematically *dismantle* the federal EPA and *replace* it with a “committee of the whole” of the 50 state environmental protection agencies.

The new organization would do a far better job of protecting our air and water quality, livelihoods, living standards, health and welfare. It will listen better to We the People – and less to eco-pressure groups.

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