

House votes to block Obama's climate plan amid veto threat (Update)

June 24 2015, byMatthew Daly



In this Jan. 20, 2015 file photo, a plume of steam billows from the coal-fired Merrimack Station in Bow, N.H. A global health commission organized by the prestigious British medical journal *Lancet* recommended in a report published Monday, June 22, 2015, substituting cleaner energy worldwide for coal will reduce air pollution and give Earth a better chance at avoiding dangerous climate change. (AP Photo/Jim Cole, File)

Defying a White House veto threat, the Republican-controlled House

approved a plan Wednesday to block a key element of President Barack Obama's strategy for fighting climate change.

Lawmakers voted 247-180 to support a bill allowing states to opt out of the Obama administration's plan to limit carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants if the state's governor determines it would cause significant rate hikes for electricity or harm reliability of service.

The bill also would delay the climate rule until all court challenges are completed. Eight Democrats joined 239 Republicans to support the bill. Four Republicans voted against the measure.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., said it would not reject Obama's plan outright, but would simply give states more time to comply, while protecting families and businesses from potentially catastrophic electricity rate hikes.

Last June, Obama rolled out a plan to reduce earth-warming pollution from power plants by 30 percent by 2030, setting in motion one of the most significant U.S. actions ever to address global warming. Once completed this summer, the rule will set the first national limits on carbon dioxide from existing power plants, the largest source of greenhouse gases in the U.S.

The administration says the rule is expected to raise electricity prices by about 4.9 percent by 2020 and spur a wave of retirements of coal-fired power plants.

A report by a consulting firm on behalf of a variety of industry groups predicts more severe impacts. The report by Boston-based NERA Economic Consulting says the plan would raise electricity prices by an average of 12 percent from 2017 to 2031 and cause nearly four dozen additional coal-fired power plants to retire beyond those expected to

retire under current rules.

Whitfield said his bill would protect jobs, noting that in Kentucky, 92 percent of electricity is generated by coal, contributing more than \$3.5 billion to the state's economy and employing 17,900 miners across the state. The coal industry is responsible for more than 700,000 jobs nationwide, Whitfield said, calling the bill part of "an all-out assault" by the Obama administration on energy abundance in the United States.

Whitfield, chairman of House subcommittee on energy and power, accused Obama of deploying the Environmental Protection Agency "to do whatever it takes to shut down fossil fuel-fired power plants across the country."

The White House said in a statement that the GOP bill undermines public health protections of Obama's Clean Power Plan and could slow or stop U.S. progress in cutting dangerous carbon dioxide pollution from power plants.

Debate over the bill comes as the Obama administration released a report this week asserting that failure to act on climate change could cause an estimated 57,000 deaths a year in the United States from poor air quality by 2100 and cost billions of dollars a year in damage from rising sea levels, increased wildfires and drought.

Pope Francis ignited a global debate on climate change last week as he issued a stern warning about global warming's consequences, especially for the poor and underdeveloped nations.

Power plants account for roughly one-third of all U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. While the United States limits emissions of arsenic, mercury and lead pollution from power plants, there are no national

limits on carbon pollution from power plants.

The GOP bill would give governors "unprecedented and broad discretion to avoid compliance" with the Clean Air Act, thereby delaying the delivery of important public health benefits of the Clean Power Plan, the White House said in its veto threat. The bill's effects would be felt hardest by those most at risk from the impacts of air pollution and climate change, such as the elderly, the infirm, children, native and tribal groups and low-income populations, the White House said.

Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., called the GOP bill "dangerous, unnecessary and premature," noting that the climate rule is not yet final.

"EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan is both modest and flexible, and will help us tackle the urgent need to reduce our carbon emissions," Pallone said. "Just saying no—as this bill would have us do—and condemning future generations (to the effects of unchecked climate change) is simply not an option."

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: House votes to block Obama's climate plan amid veto threat (Update) (2015, June 24) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-06-house-gop-obama-climate-power.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--