

Trump tosses Obama's 'clean' energy plan, embraces coal

March 28 2017, by Matthew Daly And Jill Colvin



President Donald Trump, accompanied by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt, third from left, and Vice President Mike Pence, right, signs an Energy Independence Executive Order, Tuesday, March 28, 2017, at EPA headquarters in Washington. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Declaring "the start of a new era" in energy production, President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday that he said would

revive the coal industry and create jobs.

The move makes good on his campaign pledge to unravel former President Barack Obama's plan to curb global warming. The order seeks to suspend, rescind or flag for review more than a half-dozen measures in an effort to boost domestic energy production in the form of fossil fuels.

Environmental activists, including former Vice President Al Gore, denounced the plan. But Trump said the effort would allow workers to "succeed on a level playing field for the first time in a long time."

"That is what this is all about: bringing back our jobs, bringing back our dreams and making America wealthy again," Trump said, during a ceremony at the Environmental Protection Agency headquarters, attended by a number of coal miners.

The order initiates a review of the Clean Power Plan, which restricts greenhouse gas emissions at coal-fired power plants. The regulation, which was the former president's signature effort to curb carbon emissions, has been the subject of long-running legal challenges by Republican-led states and those who profit from burning oil, coal and gas.

But just as Obama's climate efforts were often stymied by legal challenges, environmental groups are promising to fight Trump's pro-fossil fuel agenda in court.

Trump has called global warming a "hoax" invented by the Chinese, and has repeatedly criticized the power-plant rule as an attack on American workers and the struggling U.S. coal industry.

In addition to pulling back from the Clean Power Plan, the

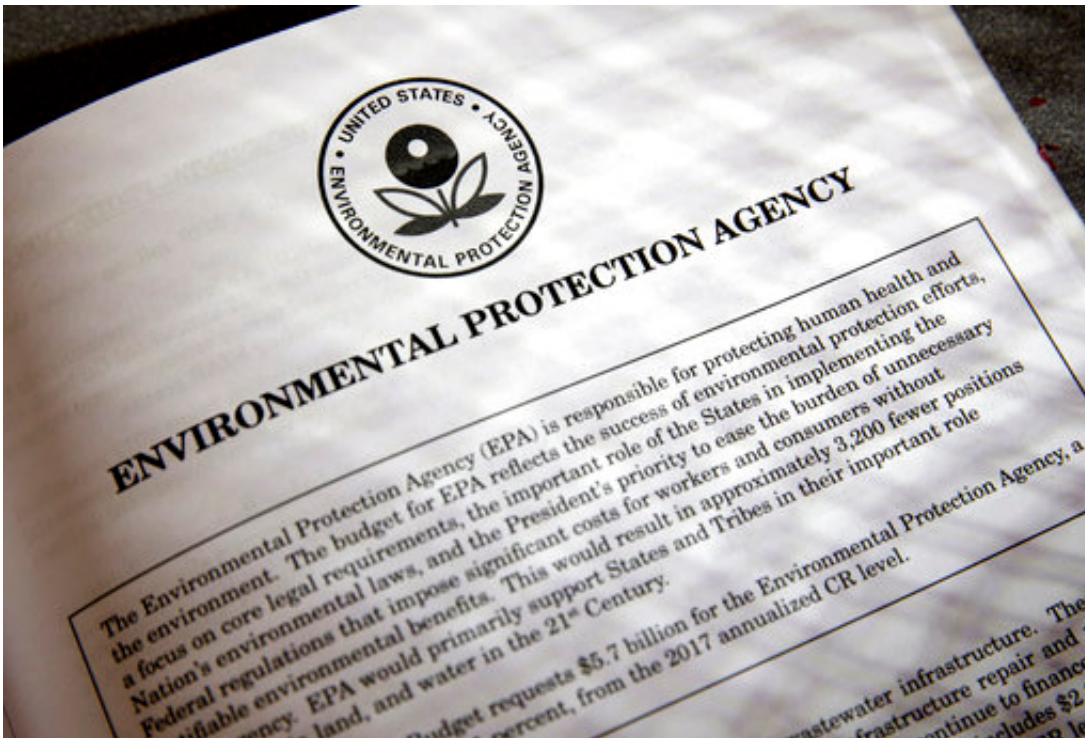
administration will also lift a 14-month-old moratorium on new coal leases on federal lands.

The Obama administration had imposed a three-year moratorium on new federal coal leases in January 2016, arguing that the \$1 billion-a-year program must be modernized to ensure a fair financial return to taxpayers and address [climate change](#).

Trump accused his predecessor of waging a "war on coal" and boasted in a speech to Congress that he has made "a historic effort to massively reduce job-crushing regulations," including some that threaten "the future and livelihoods of our great coal miners."

The order will also chip away at other regulations, including scrapping language on the "social cost" of greenhouse gases. It will initiate a review of efforts to reduce the emission of methane in oil and natural gas production as well as a Bureau of Land Management hydraulic fracturing rule, to determine whether those reflect the president's policy priorities.

It will also rescind Obama-era executive orders and memoranda, including one that addressed climate change and national security and one that sought to prepare the country for the impacts of climate change.



In this March 16, 2017, file photo, proposals for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in President Donald Trump's first budget are displayed at the Government Printing Office in Washington. President Donald Trump will sign an executive order on March 29 that will suspend, rescind, or flag for review more than half-a-dozen measures that were part of former President Barack Obama's sweeping plan to curb global warming. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, file)

The administration is still in discussion about whether it intends to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Trump's order could make it more difficult, though not impossible, for the U.S. to achieve its carbon reduction goals. The president's promises to boost coal jobs run counter to market forces, such as U.S. utilities converting coal-fired power plants to cheaper, cleaner-burning natural gas.

Trump's Environmental Protection Agency chief, Scott Pruitt, alarmed environmental groups and scientists earlier this month when he said he does not believe carbon dioxide is a primary contributor to global warming. The statement is at odds with mainstream scientific consensus and Pruitt's own agency.

The overwhelming majority of peer-reviewed studies and climate scientists agree the planet is warming, mostly due to man-made sources, including carbon dioxide, methane, halocarbons and nitrogen oxide.

Opponents say Obama's effort would have killed [coal-mining](#) jobs and driven up electricity costs. The Obama administration, some Democratic-led states and environmental groups counter that it would spur thousands of clean-energy jobs and help the U.S. meet ambitious goals to reduce carbon pollution set by the international agreement signed in Paris.

Trump's order on [coal-fired power plants](#) follows an executive order he signed last month mandating a review of an Obama-era rule aimed at protecting small streams and wetlands from development and pollution. The order instructs the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers to review a rule that redefined "waters of the United States" protected under the Clean Water Act to include smaller creeks and wetlands.

While Republicans have blamed Obama-era environmental regulations for the loss of coal jobs, federal data shows that U.S. mines have been shedding jobs for decades under presidents from both parties as a result of increasing automation and competition from [natural gas](#), which has become more abundant through hydraulic fracturing. Another factor is the plummeting cost of solar panels and wind turbines, which now can produce emissions-free electricity cheaper than burning coal.

According to an Energy Department analysis released in January, [coal](#) mining now accounts for fewer than 75,000 U.S. jobs. By contrast,

renewable energy—including wind, solar and biofuels—now accounts for more than 650,000 U.S. jobs.

The Trump administration's plans drew praise from business groups and condemnation from environmental groups.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Thomas J. Donohue praised the president for taking "bold steps to make regulatory relief and energy security a top priority."

"These executive actions are a welcome departure from the previous administration's strategy of making energy more expensive through costly, job-killing regulations that choked our economy," he said.

Former Vice President Al Gore blasted the order as "a misguided step away from a sustainable, carbon-free future for ourselves and generations to come."

"It is essential, not only to our planet, but also to our economic future, that the United States continues to serve as a global leader in solving the climate crisis by transitioning to clean energy, a transition that will continue to gain speed due to the increasing competitiveness of solar and wind," he said in a statement.

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