



TIM ECHOLS

New EPA regulations on the way

In 1850, novelist Frank Smedley wrote, "All's fair in love and war." I think this may apply to federal agencies too. Our Environmental Protection Agency seems to be doing an end run around Congress, and you will have to pay for it.

For those who missed it, the president's EPA chief [Gina McCarthy] recently announced the long-awaited policy on carbon dioxide at existing power plants across the country. I spent a weekend reading the document and then posting on social media the most egregious parts. As an energy official for Georgia who works closely with our electric membership cooperatives, I should advise you that this EPA rule is going to hurt businesses and consumers alike.

First, it is not completely clear that the EPA can actually implement a carbon policy, as this rule does. Remember, President Obama was unable to get his cap-and-trade policy through the Congress—and that was all about carbon. I also believe this "reduction"-in-carbon approach goes well beyond what the Clean Air Act intended. The 1970 law was originally designed to regulate power plants, not set energy policy.

The EPA rule further erodes state powers and your utility's autonomy to determine how our power is produced. But this is not the first time Washington has encroached on state sovereignty.

Second, my colleague on the Georgia Public Service Commission, Chuck Eaton, believes the rule may actually increase worldwide pollution, by accident. Think about this: We decrease our coal burn-rate, but because of the vast coal deposits in the United States, companies like Peabody Energy export their coal to India, China and even Germany in greater quantities—at a cheaper price. Most of these countries, desperately needing a competitive energy advantage, burn the coal without the expensive pollution equipment we have installed, thereby producing even more pollution and greenhouse gases. The net result could actually be more pollution worldwide.

As I have shared about this unintended consequence with people who favor the EPA's plan, the answer, almost to a person, is that the EPA rule will go a long way to persuade others to join the fight to save the planet. In other words, we shame foreign entities into following our lead. And if that doesn't work? They will pay! Those supporting the EPA plan suggest a carbon import tariff on items coming in from countries that refuse to play nicely.

Third, this rule seems to be more about philosophy,

politics and legacy—not science. Climate talk is en vogue right now, and the topic is receiving unprecedented media coverage, but that doesn't give the EPA the right to exceed its authority. Historically, the EPA has focused on the power plant itself and little else. Until Congress expressly authorizes them to do so, the EPA should steer clear of energy efficiency, solar and even dictating the power plants we get to turn on.

Even then, I'm not sure Congress can rein in this agency at this point in our country's evolution. Let's slow down and give our EMCs and Georgia Power Co. a chance to retire these coal plants at the end of their useful life, and be better stewards of your money. 🍌

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Georgia EMC

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