

EPA regs will hurt business and consumers



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 ratepayers will pay for it.

For those who missed it, the president’s EPA chief recently announced the long-awaited policy on carbon dioxide at existing power plants across the country. As an energy official for Georgia, I should advise you to open a new savings account because 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, the president 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 Act was originally designed to regulate power plants, not set energy policy.

The EPA rule further erodes state powers and the [Public Service Commission’s](#) responsibility to determine how our power is produced.

Second, my colleague [Chuck Eaton](#) believes that 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 even 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.

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 been 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. I plan to tell them so at the public hearing in Atlanta on July 29. 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 utility companies a chance to retire these coal plants at the end of their useful life, and be better stewards of the ratepayer’s money. Echols is a commissioner on the Georgia Public Service Commission.