

COMMENTARY

What does Trump's presidency mean for the environment?



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We can expect many changes as the country transitions from the Obama administration to a Trump administration. One issue that will receive much attention is the environment.

It is too early to know what the Trump administration will do with regard to environmental protection and energy regulation. Trump has made certain promises and has named enough of his cabinet to have an idea of what his environmental policy may look like.

Trump plans to reorganize domestic energy and environmental priorities, and to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord. He plans to open onshore and offshore leasing on federal lands and waters to encourage the production of fossil fuel resources in an effort to make America energy independent. The Trump administration says it "will end the war on coal," review all anti-coal regulations, and reopen shuttered coal mines. Trump wants to reduce the role of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to an advisory one and scrap the Climate Action Plan and the Clean Power Plan, Obama's plan to move utilities toward lower carbon emissions. It is Trump's view that these steps will lead to "more jobs, more revenues, more wealth, higher wages, and lower energy prices."

Trump selected Myron Ebell to run the EPA working group on his transition team. Ebell is the director of energy and environmental policy at Competitive Enterprise Institute, and is known around the world as one of America's most prominent climate-change skeptics.

He has selected Scott Pruitt, the Oklahoma attorney general and a friend of the fossil fuel industry, to run the EPA. Mr. Pruitt has been a leader in the legal battle against President Obama's climate change policies.

Trump's pick for energy secretary, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry proposed scrapping the Energy Department in 2011. His selection is a promise that there will be an emphasis on energy sources like coal and oil, rather than on clean energy sources like wind and solar.

Ryan Zinke, Montana's freshman represen-

tative and a former Navy SEAL commander, was selected as Interior Secretary. Zinke is a strong advocate for American energy independence. He supports a policy that includes renewable, alternative, and fossil fuel energy. He wants to cut through the bureaucracy to ensure that the national parks, forests, and other public lands are "used effectively."

Finally, with another nod to big oil, Trump has chosen ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson to serve as secretary of state.

These appointments are a significant indication of the direction we can expect Trump's environmental and energy policies to take.

Although it could take a while for Trump to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris accord, in the meantime we can expect him to not enforce its guidelines and to repeal climate change regulation put in place under Obama's administration. Trump will not face a lot of resistance from a Republican Congress, but pulling out would have implications for Trump's dealings with foreign leaders. On the other hand, fossil fuel industry advocates will see much opportunity in this policy change, such as opening of more public land and offshore areas to drilling, and building more energy infrastructure.

The coal industry is buoyed by Mr. Trump's promises to rescind the coal mining lease moratorium and repeal anti-coal regulations. It is the coal sector's view that it has suffered lower demand and job loss as a result of the impact of regulations directed at its industry. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that coal is going to make a comeback. It remains to be seen whether the steps Trump takes, if any, to increase the use of coal will make economic sense. Coal is a fuel that is being phased out because of its pollution and because of the falling prices of renewables. Investors are choosing solar and wind because of economics.

During his campaign, Trump showed a lack of interest in wind and solar and voiced his intention to end federal spending on renewables in order to support a fossil fuel energy policy. However, if the United States begins to fall behind economically because the renewables energy market is being ignored, the Trump administration may take a different tack. The first and best innovators in the world are going to be the ones who get the advantage in the developing energy market.

One of Trump's promises is fairly certain to be

carried out – his plan to eliminate EPA's Clean Power Plan. The Clean Power Plan limits greenhouse gas emissions from existing fossil fuel-fired power plants. The rule considers the states' ability to shift power generation to cleaner sources. The Clean Power Plan is under review by the U.S. Court of Appeals in a suit brought by 27 states and a few corporate interests, over whether EPA properly exercised its authority under the Clean Air Act. The case is expected to go to the Supreme Court next year. Legal commentators have suggested that Trump has several options for addressing the Clean Power Plan. He could not defend it in court, rescind the rule, or ask Congress for support in blocking it.

The actions Trump has promised to take are in keeping with his plans to reduce federal regulation, and to move away from a strong central government. Trump's anti-regulation position is based on a view that the economy will grow if business is free of the control of an over-powerful federal government. It is important to keep in mind that this position anticipates that the states will retain their authority to regulate and we may see states take up the slack. As federal environmental programs are gutted, states are likely to take steps to control their environmental affairs. This will mean a lack of uniformity across the country, and neighboring and downwind states could end up with complaints about pollution impacts from states with less stringent environmental regulation.

Significantly for businesses on Long Island, New York State has a robust environmental conservation and protection program. We can expect that New York will continue its environmental regulatory program during a Trump presidency.

Many questions remain about what Trump's environmental policy will look like, but one thing is fairly certain: we are likely to see a rollback of efforts to combat climate change, including the repealing of regulations, a push for increased fossil fuel development, and a limiting of the work of energy regulators. In the face of this expectation, we will see the states take on a more significant role in environmental protection and energy regulation.

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