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The Clean Power Plan – Has the EPA got it right...

This year the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took a major step in addressing the total carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission reduction targets expected from the country over the next decade. It's certainly the most rational and productive step in the right direction this country has seen in quite some time. The proposal is called the Clean Power Plan and is a state by state assessment, meaning each state will be given a different reduction percentage they are expected to meet. This percentage is calculated by taking the pounds of emissions produced by coal-fired power plants divided by the total state electricity generation from fossil-fueled power plants and some low- or zero-emitting power sources. Vermont and Washington DC are the only exceptions as neither contains a coal-fired power plant source for electricity.

The goal is reached by reducing the overall carbon intensity of the power sector, meaning reduction strategies could include more efficient technology, improving power plant operations or relying more on low-carbon energy sources. The EPA determines that 40% of United States CO₂ emissions come directly from power plants. This Clean Power Plan is the first in its kind to place a national limit on emissions, before it was a free for all for polluters. However, based on its unique method of allowing each state to individually evaluate its needs and concerns, it takes the fairest approach possible while also imposing this limit. States are encouraged to determine what works best for them and to provide their goal objectives back to the EPA for review and follow-up. While Nebraska is heavily dependent on coal-fired power plants to supply the majority of our electricity, we are also a state rich in potential wind or natural gas opportunities, both of which the Nebraska Power Association are looking into.

Nebraska also holds the unique status as being the only state in the US that provides electricity to homes and businesses through a publicly owned utility structure. By being publicly owned, electricity costs are usually much lower in Nebraska than in other states, as well as citizens of the state have a stronger voice when it comes time to adopt changes to the energy sector. Meaning Nebraskans may have the greatest influence over how our state addresses the

proposal's requirements. While the overall goal of the utility companies is to provide energy to the most amount of people at the lowest cost, the cost is currently being determined by the private cost to consumers. With the new legislature, finally there is an emphasis on seeing what the public cost of energy is to consumers. This means that, while energy prices may rise to accommodate the conversion of energy sources, the price of energy will reflect the long-term benefits of consumers' needs rather than cost of burning our resources right here right now.

Citizens aren't the only ones who will benefit. Businesses across the country have supported the new plan as well. A letter sent to President Barack Obama through the sustainability group Ceres boasted signatures from IKEA, Kellogg, Acer, Adidas, Nestle, Starbucks and many more, all of whom support the new proposal. However, there has been some opposition from businesses or groups, like the New York ISO, who claim the costs to reduce emissions are too high to warrant the switch to higher efficiency. While it may be a high up-front cost to redesign power plant operations or install more efficient technology, the continued detrimental effects to the economy, human health, and the environment at large will far out-weigh the potential cost.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has stated that to limit greenhouse gases to 500 parts per billion could cost 3% of the national GDP, with this figure climbing the longer we put off addressing the issue. Nestle Waters North American Chief Executive Tim Brown has stated that focusing on renewable energy and efficiency is the cheapest form of compliance to the new regulations. A report featuring economists from Yale, Harvard, Stanford, MIT, University of Chicago and University of California-Berkeley and Davis also support the plan. They even advocate for stronger emission caps and state the transformation of the energy sector will not negatively impact the economy.

The Nebraska reduction goal is to reduce from our average 2,009 pounds per megawatt hour to 1,479 pounds per megawatt hour. By 2030. A measly 27% drop over the next fifteen years? The diligent and perpetually sensible people of Nebraska should find this to be an easily accomplished feat. So, has the EPA gotten it right or what?