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The Clean Power Plan needs to be a Law

The Clean Power Plan (CPP) is a long overdue policy which is necessary to direct national investment in emerging markets and create an intelligent energy infrastructure that strives to operate at max efficiency. To this point, the US has developed using inefficient and dirty fuels, a method which allowed for cheap and reliable energy generation, but is largely responsible for the change in global climate. If we expect to prevent climate change, our energy infrastructure must be reformed.

Countries like Denmark have led the way in energy reform by creating policies set to reach 100% renewable generation by 2050 (8). This ambitious endeavor solidifies Denmark's commitment towards fostering innovation by creating long term investments in the energy market. They are not the only ones; the International Energy Agency list 29 countries with adjustments to their energy policy, all with a similar goal: combat the harmful effects of GHG emissions (6). Now is the time for the US to join the movement, especially considering we account for around 17% of total carbon emissions (5). Despite the damning evidence, many still believe that the US should proceed without an energy policy. Much of the criticism of the CPP stems from the legality of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforcing regulations on the energy sector and its disregard for the economic effects on coal intensive states. For these reasons, two coal companies and 14 states are challenging the ruling (12). But, the EPA is required by Congress to regulate pollutants such as CO₂ stated in Section 111b of the Clean Air Act. As for the dying coal industry, jobs and sales are already on the decline, not to mention over 60% of coal plants are reaching the end of their useful life (11). It would be ignorant not to take measures to replace coal with more efficient sources which are becoming increasingly cost competitive and pose fewer risks. To ensure the ability of the CPP to facilitate this movement, congress should pass it as a law which would prevent special interest lobbyist (or candidates support by) from eliminating said regulations.

In a 2015 report, the global advanced energy market was assessed at a worth of \$1.3 trillion (4) which translates to about 11% of global energy consumption (3). Why is this important? It's still a relatively small portion of the energy market, as the numbers indicate that 89% of the market is still reliant on various fossil fuel based and nuclear sources. That being said, this also means that there is ample room for growth. Previously I mentioned how there is a movement towards cleaner energy generation, as countries begin to restructure their energy systems, we will see that market share grow. Entrepreneurs are seeing this trend too, CEO of Virgin Enterprise (Richard Branson) believes that renewables are the next big thing. In fact, he set up a 25 million dollar prize to those who could invent a technology which could reduce atmospheric CO₂ (2). Similar initiatives are crucial for a change, but 25 million dollars is pocket change compared to the amount that will be needed to see any real growth. More substantial investments will be necessary.

The Clean Power Plan operates by setting CO₂ emissions standards based on an analysis of feasible improvement each state can make to their energy infrastructure. The state and federal government will then work together to form a plan to reach their standard. This plan may involve improving efficiencies of coal based plants, switching coal plants to natural gas, or implementing renewable energy systems. The proposal is to be completed by 2016 and is expected to reach its objective by the year 2030. The CPP also provides an incentive program for states who choose to use renewable as their emission reduction method (10). Once implemented, sufficient market opportunities and investments will be created which allow companies to keep operations within the US while they continue to improve and innovate energy systems. This will help the US gain a considerable share of the emerging sustainable & renewable energy markets. The benefits far outweigh the initial costs associated with reforming our energy infrastructure. To keep the US on track for future growth, the Clean Power Plan must be passed as a law. Without it, we continue our ignorance towards the issue of global warming and refute an opportunity to progress as a nation.

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