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Renewable energy
Climate Consensus - the 97%

The war on coal is over. Coal lost.

Coal can't compete with cheaper clean energy. The Trump administration can't save expensive, dirty energy.

163
Dana Nuccitelli

Monday 16 October 2017 11.00 BST



Aerial view of an industrial base consisting of wind turbines, solar panels and fish ponds at tidal flats on July 25, 2017 in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province of China. Photograph: VCG/VCG via Getty Images

Last week, Trump's EPA administrator Scott Pruitt announced, "the war on coal is over." If there ever was a war on coal, the coal industry has lost. According to a new report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, many old American coal power plants are being retired or converted to natural gas, and new coal power plants aren't being built because they've become more expensive than natural gas, wind, and solar energy:

> *The share of US electricity coming from coal fell from 51 percent in 2008 to 31 percent in 2016—an unprecedented change. New UCS analysis finds that, of the coal units that remain, roughly one in four plans to retire or convert to natural gas; another 17 percent are uneconomic and could face retirement soon.*

Natural gas has now surpassed coal to supply 32% of US electricity (up from 21% in 2008), and solar and wind are up to 10% (from 3% in 2008).



Evolution of the American power grid mix since 1960. Illustration: Carbon Brief

This trend will continue. As old coal plants continue to retire and be replaced by cheaper renewables and natural gas, their share of the US electricity supply will continue to plummet, and coal will become a fossil fuel in every sense of the word. That's why American companies continue to invest in cheap, clean renewable energy. As a result, our air and water are becoming cleaner, Americans are becoming healthier, and our carbon pollution is falling.

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Two more coal plants to close in Texas. Believe that makes 12 this year nationwide: m.chron.com/business/energ…
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Vistra Energy to close two more Texas coal plants
Vistra Energy said it will shutter two more Texas coal-fired power plants and cut more than 600 jobs, blaming low electricity prices
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24 184 243

The shift away from coal poses a challenge for regions in which the local economy depends on the fossil fuel, but the transition is inevitable. A wise economic policy would involve funding programs to help those regions adapt to the change (Hillary Clinton proposed one such plan during her presidential campaign). A recent study showed that Americans are willing to pay a carbon tax with some of the revenue going to assist displaced coal workers. The Trump administration has instead opted to try and slow coal's inevitable decline.

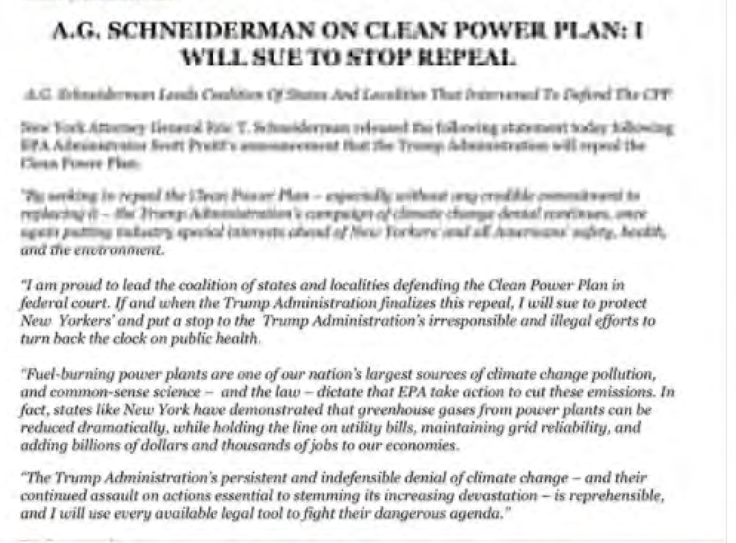
Trump is desperate to burn more coal

The Trump administration seems hell-bent on causing as much global warming as possible. First there was the historically irresponsible decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement, joining war-torn Syria as the only world countries to reject the treaty. Then just a few weeks ago, Trump's Energy Secretary Rick Perry announced a plan to effectively take coal out of the free market and instead subsidize it with taxpayer dollars to bail out the industry and keep uneconomical coal power plants open. The hypocrisy ran thick - as Perry called for propping up the coal industry with increased taxpayer subsidies, Pruitt called for an end to subsidies for renewable energy:

> *I would do away with these incentives that we give to wind and solar. I'd let them stand on their own and compete against coal and natural gas and other sources, and let utilities make real-time market decisions on those types of things as opposed to being propped up by tax incentives and other types of credits that occur*

Soon thereafter, Priutt announced that Trump's EPA will repeal the Clean Power Plan. That policy represented America's most significant effort to cut its carbon pollution, but had been mired in a legal battle over whether the plan exceeded EPA's regulatory authority under the Clean Air Act. Rather than let the courts decide the case, which many experts felt the EPA would win, Pruitt stopped defending the case in court and ended the program.

The problem is that according to the US Supreme Court, the EPA is legally required to regulate dangerous carbon pollution. Pruitt's EPA may propose a dramatically weakened plan that probably wouldn't survive a court challenge, or he may just try to run out the clock on Trump's term. As with the disastrous Republican effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act, they don't have a replacement plan. In the meantime, states and environmental groups will take his Clean Power Plan repeal to court.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 9, 2017

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A.G. SCHNEIDERMAN ON CLEAN POWER PLAN: I WILL SUE TO STOP REPEAL

A.G. Schneiderman Leads Coalition Of States And Localities That Intervened To Defend The CPP

New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman released the following statement today following EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's announcement that the Trump Administration will repeal the Clean Power Plan:

"By seeking to repeal the Clean Power Plan – especially without any credible commitment to replacing it – the Trump Administration's campaign of climate change denial continues, once again putting industry special interests ahead of New Yorkers' and all Americans' safety, health, and the environment.

"I am proud to lead the coalition of states and localities defending the Clean Power Plan in federal court. If and when the Trump Administration finalizes this repeal, I will sue to protect New Yorkers' and put a stop to the Trump Administration's irresponsible and illegal efforts to turn back the clock on public health.

"Fuel-burning power plants are one of our nation's largest sources of climate change pollution, and common-sense science – and the law – dictate that EPA take action to cut these emissions. In fact, states like New York have demonstrated that greenhouse gases from power plants can be reduced dramatically, while holding the line on utility bills, maintaining grid reliability, and adding billions of dollars and thousands of jobs to our economies.

"The Trump Administration's persistent and indefensible denial of climate change – and their continued assault on actions essential to stemming its increasing devastation – is reprehensible, and I will use every available legal tool to fight their dangerous agenda."

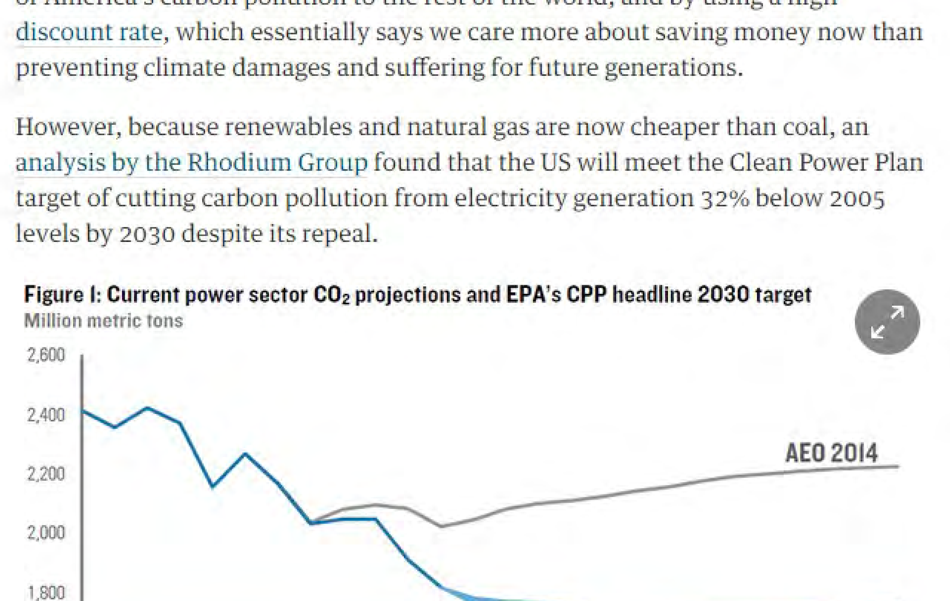
Eric Schneiderman @AGSchneiderman Follow

I will sue to stop the Trump Admin's irresponsible and illegal #CleanPowerPlan repeal, which threatens NYers public health & environment.
10:31 PM - Oct 9, 2017

229 2,694 5,791

Pruitt's Clean Power Plan repeal justification is largely based on bogus economics, which the Trump administration is using to reduce government estimates of the 'social cost of carbon.' This figure - which estimates how much a ton of carbon pollution costs society in terms of damages caused by climate change - is integral to many government policies. A majority of economists think the government's estimate is too low, but Pruitt's EPA manipulated the math by ignoring the costs of America's carbon pollution to the rest of the world, and by using a high discount rate, which essentially says we care more about saving money now than preventing climate damages and suffering for future generations.

However, because renewables and natural gas are now cheaper than coal, an analysis by the Rhodium Group found that the US will meet the Clean Power Plan target of cutting carbon pollution from electricity generation 32% below 2005 levels by 2030 despite its repeal.



US power sector carbon dioxide emissions projections without the Clean Power Plan in place. Illustration: Rhodium Group

That being said, with the Clean Power Plan in place, the US likely would have beat its targets. As this excellent tool created by Carbon Brief shows, many states like California and Idaho are ahead of the curve, but other states like Texas and West Virginia would have been forced to accelerate their transitions to clean energy, had the Clean Power Plan been enforced.

The ball is in Congress' court

The good news is that none of the Trump administration's moves are permanent. The next president can rejoin the Paris climate agreement, have the EPA draft new rules to regulate power plant carbon pollution, and revise the social cost of carbon based on real science and math. As Citizens' Climate Lobby Executive Director Mark Reynolds wrote:

> *Those who cheer the EPA's move should remember that President Obama initiated the Clean Power Plan in 2015 in the face of Congress's inaction on climate change. Without effective legislation to combat climate change, a future president could just as easily go down the path of executive action and regulations again. The best answer here is for Congress to pass legislation putting the market to work on solving climate change.*

There's been some movement in this direction. A group of Republican elder statesmen in the Climate Leadership Council called for a revenue-neutral carbon tax, which would grow the economy. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) recently called for a price on carbon pollution and is said to be working with Senator Whitehouse (D-RI) on climate legislation. The House Climate Solutions Caucus is now up to 30 Republican and 30 Democratic members and is trying to craft a bipartisan replacement for the Clean Power Plan.

The Trump administration is taking every possible step to burn away our future, but fortunately the transition to a clean energy economy is unstoppable, and many of his party members are coming to grips with that reality.

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> *I appreciate there not being a paywall: it is more democratic for the media to be available for all and not a commodity to be purchased by a few. I'm happy to make a contribution so others with less means still have access to information.*
> Thomasine F-R.

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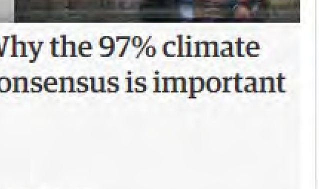

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Climate Consensus - the 97%


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Bernie Thomas 9m ago 0

"Then just a few weeks ago, Trump's Energy Secretary Rick Perry announced a plan to effectively take coal out of the free market and instead subsidize it with taxpayer dollars to bail out the industry and keep uneconomical coal power plants open."

Dana you are repeating the same falsehood you asserted last week. I'm not calling it a lie because that would mean you are knowingly repeating something that is false. You may not realize it is false. Nonetheless you keep repeating it and you need to correct the record.

Last week your headline, your subheadline, and your opening paragraphs stated that Rick Perry's plan involved "taxpayer" subsidies. But this is simply untrue. There are no "taxpayer" subsidies involved in Perry's plan. In your previous article you linked to a VOX piece and even that never asserted that ratepayer increases were "taxpayer" funded. Yet you can't seem to shake this "taxpayer" funded concept. So rather than link to your previous article (where this mistake originated) why not instead go back to the actual source. You will find no mention of the mandated regulatory cost increase of the 90 day strategic fuel reserve being funded by the taxpayer. It is a cost imposed on the power generators, and the PUCs are directed to allow the utility providers to treat is as an allowable re-imburseable cost which can be pass along to their utility consumers. Nowhere does the Perry plan refer to taxpayer funded subsidies. Please correct it.

Reply Report

Michael Williams 21m ago 0

It seems like whale oil should be a reasonable choice……..

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