

The Climate Yawns

Donald Trump is no more a planet wrecker than Barack Obama (as measured to the third decimal).



President Trump before signing an executive order on energy independence at the headquarters of the Environmental Protection Agency, March 28, 2017. PHOTO: RON SACHS/ZUMA PRESS



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The oddest criticism of Donald Trump's climate action this week was the claim, mentioned almost triumphantly by every news source, that it would save few coal jobs. The economic and technological forces, especially the flood of low-carbon natural gas from fracking, are just too powerful.

Then why, if you're a Democrat, put yourself in that position in the first place to take blame for killing coal jobs? Why enact a costly regulation to do what the market was doing for free? When everybody else wanted to blame the Florida recount for his 2000 defeat, Al Gore was smart enough privately to blame gun control. When you lose your home state as presidential candidate, something is wrong. The same blundering ineptitude explains how the Obama alliance with the greens threw away first Congress and then a presidency.

Opinion Journal video

Business World Columnist Holman Jenkins Jr. on the president's energy reforms. Photo credit: Getty Images.

Of course the news reports are right: "The regulatory changes are entirely outweighed by these technological changes, not to mention the price of natural gas or renewables," Mark Muro of the Brookings Institution was quoted telling the [New York Times](#) .

So potent and large are these global forces that repealing the Obama rules, costly as they are, not only won't affect coal jobs, it won't affect climate.

Gina McCarthy, Mr. Obama's EPA administrator, admitted as much when confronted, during a 2015 House hearing, with the fact that, by the agency's own climate models, the effect would be only 1/100th of a degree Celsius. Instead, she said success should be measured in terms of "positioning the U.S. for leadership in an international discussion."

Even so, many climate activists felt the need to walk back Ms. McCarthy's concession by insisting Obama policies would have a measurable effect—on the amount of CO₂ released. Yes, the relative decrease would be tiny but measurable, though the climate effect would be zip. This is akin to medical researchers claiming a drug a success because it's detectable in the bloodstream, not because it improves health.

And don't get us started on the "social cost of carbon," a mechanism of policy justification created by the Obama EPA to assign a dollar-value benefit to carbon abatement rules that, in total, will produce zero impact on climate.

Pile up all the government policies enacted or seriously on the table, and their net effect is zilch. A new McKinsey study, that would be hilarious if it weren't so sad, points out that Germany's switch to renewables has been a success by almost every metric except CO₂ output—which is up instead of down.

Rising energy prices to support this energy transition have had one measurable effect—more than 330,000 German households have had their electricity shut off in the past year from nonpayment of bills almost three times as high as those paid by U.S. households.

Germany, needless to add, is many greens' idea of a country "positioned for leadership in international discussions."

No rational consideration, however, will abate the torrent of priestly imprecations hurled by green activists this week at Mr. Trump. The New York Times insists that Trumpian action "risks the planet"—plainly false since nothing either Mr. Trump or Mr. Obama did will make a difference to the planet.

Literally no amount of money dissipated on climate policy is excessive to such people, because their shamanistic status is directly proportional to the social waste they can conjure. In the realm of religion are we called upon to perform symbolic actions whose purpose (and cost) is aimed at testifying to our membership in the elect.

The most poignant question, however, is what happened to Democrats? They were once a party whose members cared whether policy was efficient and produced benefits for the American people.

Democrats deserve a large share of the credit for the rescue of the failing U.S. economy of the 1970s by throwing out a host of perverse regulatory policies, not that they embrace or even acknowledge this legacy today—which is the problem.

Airline deregulation was born in Ted Kennedy's administrative practice subcommittee. His aide, Stephen Breyer, now a Supreme Court justice, recalled a working-class Boston constituent asking

why the senator was focused on airline issues when this voter could never afford to fly. "That is why," said Kennedy.

The Democratic Party once had a brain where regulation was concerned, understanding that the ultimate purpose was a net public good, not an in-gathering of power to Washington for the benefit of lobbyists and influence peddlers.

It was not yet today's Democratic Party of Chuck Schumer, who isn't stupid and yet is associated with no body of policy thought or analysis. If he even has anybody on his staff deputized to think about the results of policy, it probably is the lowliest intern.

A wrecking ball of a president was the Trump electorate's answer to this problem. It's hard even now to say they were wrong. If he delivers nothing in the next four years, it is alarming to suspect that this likely would still be a better result than we would have gotten under Hillary Clinton.