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Energy and Environment

Trump victory reverses U.S. energy and environmental priorities

By **Steven Mufson** and **Brady Dennis** November 9

Donald J. Trump comes into office with a plan to toss out most of what President Obama achieved on energy and the environment.

While vowing to “cancel” the international Paris climate accord Obama championed, Trump would also rearrange domestic energy and environmental priorities. He wants to open up federal lands to oil and gas drilling and coal mining. He wants to eliminate regulations he calls needless. He would scrap proposed regulations for tighter methane controls on domestic drillers. And he wants to shrink the role of the Environmental Protection Agency to a mostly advisory one and pull back the Clean Power Plan, Obama’s proposed plan to push utilities toward lower carbon emissions.

Although Trump has portrayed himself as the ultimate outsider, in putting together a transition team the New York real estate mogul has chosen veteran Washington insiders, many of them lobbyists for fossil fuel

companies and skeptics about climate science.

Oil industry executives were delighted.

“It sure looks a whole lot friendlier than it would have under President Podesta ... I mean President Clinton,” Stephen Brown, vice president of government relations for the oil refiner Tesoro, said, referring to John Podesta, the Clinton campaign chairman who views steps to slow climate change as a high priority and who led climate efforts under Obama.

Brown predicted that the Paris climate accord “will be scrapped quickly,” obstacles and “procedural hurdles” to infrastructure projects such as pipelines would be reexamined, and regulations about the social cost of carbon and other environmental impacts would be “gone.”

“The Clean Power Plan will die a slow death,” he said, adding that public lands permitting for oil and gas drilling would open up.

Only a day earlier, environmental groups had been planning to immediately press a President-elect Hillary Clinton to stick to a tough set of energy and environmental policies. Clinton had been adamant that she would follow through on the promises Obama made under the Paris climate accord, and vowed to defend and implement the Clean Power Plan and reduce the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions by nearly a third by 2025, relative to 2005 levels. Yet environmental groups still believed they had to make sure she did not backslide.

Now the environmental groups that have helped shape Obama’s policies are on the defensive.

“We’re feeling angry and sad and contemplative,” said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club. “Trump is now, as president-elect, soon to be the only head of state on the planet that doesn’t believe in climate change, nor thinks we should do anything about it. That should strike fear in

the hearts of every parent in this country.”

Asked how the environmental movement would deal with a President Trump, Bill McKibben, founder of the climate action group 350.org, said in an email “[I] don’t really know. I think it’s clear that he wants no part of environmental progress, and I imagine the damage from this election will be measured in geologic time. We will do what we can, but truthfully the path forward is not all that clear to me.”

Other environmental group leaders tried to rally their supporters, vowing to use any means they could to fight the reversal of what they see as the positive environmental progress of recent years.

“Sixteen years ago when faced with the election of President Bush, the environmental community utilized the courts, the Senate filibuster, watchdogged political appointees and galvanized the public to take action,” Erich Pica, president of Friends of the Earth, said in an email early Wednesday.

“We will have to take these same actions against a President Trump to protect the gains that the American people want for clean air and clean water. After the fights to kill the Keystone XL pipeline, the fights to ban fracking, and the successful efforts to shut down coal plants, the environmental movement is stronger than we have ever been.”

Gene Karpinski, president of the League of Conservation Voters, acknowledged that Tuesday was “clearly a disappointing night” for environmental activists.

“I’ve been doing this work for 40 years, and there are times we’re very aggressively on offense, and sometimes we need to play defense,” Karpinski said, vowing that the community would continue to organize, litigate and pressure both companies and the government. “Despite what Mr. Trump might think, the climate crisis is real and not a hoax.... We need to do what we can at all levels to double down and make progress, in this country and around the world.”

State governments could also still play a role in keeping movement on clean energy going. Nearly 30 states have renewable electricity standards, which require utilities to boost their use of renewable energy. Many companies already are in the process of meeting those goals.

The climate action group 350.org said in a statement: “Trump’s election is a disaster, but we must channel our anger and fear into hope and resolve. Our work becomes much harder now, but it’s not impossible, and we refuse to give up.”

The cast of influential characters will be far different under Trump than Obama or Clinton.

The Trump transition teams have turned to Mike McKenna for advice on the Energy Department and David Bernhardt, former Interior Department solicitor general under President Bush, on the Interior Department. “Both are smart, canny individuals who understand the nuances of the departments for which they’ve been asked to provide assistance,” Scott Segal, co-head of government relations at the legal and lobbying firm Bracewell, said in an email.

McKenna, who is president of the firm MWR Strategies and who worked for both the Energy and Transportation departments, has lobbied on behalf of Dow Chemical, Koch Industries, Southern, GDF Suez and TECO Energy.

Bernhardt, a partner at the law firm Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, has represented a wide variety of clients on regulatory issues such as the Endangered Species Act but has not lobbied for corporations.

In addition, Myron Ebell, head of energy and environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, had headed Trump’s transition team on the EPA. Ebell has been a skeptic about climate change and has called many mainstream climate studies false.

Trump himself has called the concept of global warming everything from a “hoax” to “bulls—” to a scheme “created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.”

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Segal said a Trump administration would be “clearly in favor of enhanced exploration and production of oil and gas as a tenet of energy, economic and national security policy.” His key advisers have included Oklahoma-based shale oil producer Harold Hamm and North Dakota Rep. Kevin Cramer (R). Trump has spoken to conferences on shale drilling in both North Dakota and Pennsylvania, rich shale drilling territory.

Segal said that Trump has vowed to “revoke policies that impose unwarranted restrictions on new drilling technologies,’ which may be an oblique reference to new restrictions proposed on methane emissions from oil and gas production.”

On renewable fuels for vehicles, Trump has been generally supportive of ethanol, Segal said, but he wants to alter the renewable fuels policy to help refiners who have paid substantial amounts for tradeable credits under a

complex scheme.

But Segal cautioned that “a Trump administration, given the nature of the campaign that was waged, has the freedom not to be doctrinaire. Since the campaign was run largely outside the strictures of traditional party policy, a Trump administration is in a sense free to develop energy policy to its own liking and based on facts on the ground as it sees them.”

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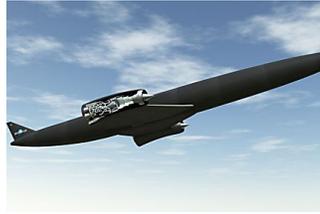
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