



The cost to jobs and public health from the EPA rollbacks (Episode 30)

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The US Environmental Protection Agency has announced a major deregulation of greenhouse gas emissions, effectively repealing 25-year-old emission standards for all light, medium, and heavy vehicles and engines of model years 2012 to 2027 and beyond. Host Monica de Bolle is joined by Jason Walsh (BlueGreen Alliance) to analyze the basis of the new Trump administration regulation, which rescinds the 2009 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Endangerment Finding and subsequent federal GHG emission standards, and how these rollbacks will affect public health, climate issues, and jobs in the United States.

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MONICA DE BOLLE: On February 12, the Environmental Protection Agency announced it would rescind the Greenhouse Gas Endangerment Finding and all subsequent federal GHG emission standards. This move effectively repeals 25 years of emission standards for all vehicles and engines of model years 2012 to 2027. The EPA claims this action will save taxpayers 1.3 trillion dollars, but what will the impacts be on jobs, public health, and climate change?

You're listening to an episode of Policy for the Planet, a podcast exploring the global response to the climate crisis. I'm your host Monica de Bolle, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

To help us dive in deeper to what these rollbacks mean, I'm joined by:

JASON WALSH: Jason Walsh. I'm the executive director of the BlueGreen Alliance. We're a national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations.



MONICA DE BOLLE: Jason has more than twenty-five years of experience at state and federal levels in policy development and advocacy in climate, clean energy, and economic and workforce development.

Jason, welcome to Policy for the Planet. It's a real pleasure to have you on. So the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency rescinded the 2009 greenhouse gas endangerment finding, which is the biggest deregulation push in the agency's history. Can you please give us an overview of the importance of the endangerment of finding and the significance of its elimination, please.

JASON WALSH: Yeah, I'm happy to, Monica, and it's a pleasure being here. So the endangerment finding serves as the basis of EPA's regulation of greenhouse gas emissions. Essentially, it's a determination that greenhouse gases threaten public health and welfare and as such can be regulated by the EPA under the Clean Air Act.

This determination was made by EPA in 2009. The Trump EPA's medication of the endangerment finding, if it holds up in court, would mean that EPA could no longer regulate these emissions. The rollback is targeted first at emissions from vehicles, but then it could be used to dismantle EPA imposed limits on pollution from power plants and from oil and gas production.

This will be an enormous legal fight in the courts, which presumably the Trump administration wants. are making a bet, I believe, that a conservative Supreme Court will overturn well-established precedent, most notably its own 2007 ruling that EPA does indeed have the authority to limit greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act.

But the announcement of this action at the White House in the Roosevelt Room by the EPA Administrator Lee Zellin standing alongside President Trump suggests they think this is a debate they can also win in the court of public opinion. So it's important for we the public to understand the numbers that are used by EPA, those they cite, those they choose to ignore in making the argument for this decision. And I'm happy to talk about that a little bit.

MONICA DE BOLLE: Yeah. So could you give us some numbers on the actual implications for workers, how it affects public health, how all of this might play out, assuming that the Trump administration gets its way and the revocation stays in place.

JASON WALSH: Happy to. So the most important number to examine is 1.3 trillion. This is what Administrator Zeldin claimed will be the total cost savings to Americans,



mostly from paying in their model, from paying for less expensive vehicles. What Zeldin didn't say, is that his agency declined to estimate the economic benefits of first of all, owning an EV compared to an ICE vehicle, internal combustion engine vehicle over time, which are substantial with respect to fuel and maintenance costs.

But even more consequentially than that emission, Zeldin also failed to mention that EPA has discontinued its longstanding practice dating back to an executive order by President Reagan in the early 1980s of counting the monetary value of the health benefits of less air pollution along psychos to industry when evaluating new agency goals. That sounds very wonky.

In plainer English, EPA will no longer count the cost to the American people of more sickness, more hospital visits, and more premature death that result from air pollution. They are effectively assigning a value of zero dollars to human life, which just in moral terms is a little breathtaking. In cost benefit terms, and you're an economist, right? So you appreciate good cost benefit analysis. It's the equivalent of...a scorekeeper in a basketball game counting the baskets of only one team and not the other team in determining the winner of the game.

MONICA DE BOLLE: That's the great way to put it.

JASON WALSH: Yeah. And so, and so before this administration essentially cooked the books, EPA's previous analysis demonstrated repeatedly the unequivocal value of regulating air pollution, including a study that calculated that the benefits of Clean Air Act standards outweighed the cost 25 to one. You also see 30 to one in other cost benefit analysis.

In human life terms, which I think frankly resonate more than cost-benefit ratios, right? Another EPA study showed that in the year 2020 alone, Clean Air Act standards saved an estimated 230,000 lives.

So to repeat, this administration only calculates the cost savings to industry from gutting pollution standards, but it does not count the cost to the American people of gutting those standards, which will be enormous. And it's important to emphasize will not be born equally billionaires like Donald Trump will do fine, right? Oil company CEOs, some of president Trump's biggest campaign donors will do better than fine. The people most impacted by this action, if it holds up in court will be the people most vulnerable to the impacts of air pollution and climate change: outdoor workers, seniors, children, the



already sick, and the Americans living in fence line communities who are disproportionately low income and disproportionately people of color.

MONICA DE BOLLE: So let me step back a moment and say something because you mentioned that they underscored the cost savings. did not mention the benefits. And I need to say one thing. We cannot do a proper evaluation of any kind of public policy whatsoever. It doesn't matter what it is. We cannot properly evaluate policy if we don't have an understanding of, yes, cost.

But benefits, because the trade-off matters. And you mentioned this figure that benefits are estimated to be about, let's say, 30 times larger or 30 to one to costs. So if the cost savings is 1.3 trillion, the benefits that we are forgoing is of the order of about 30 trillion, which is really eye-opening. And I think...something that when, when we think about this from a, from a public opinion perspective, you know, this, this is a lot of benefits that, that we are forgoing, not to mention the other things that you've mentioned, which are, you know, people will be affected by this disproportionately, those that can defend themselves against, you know, air pollution and other things stemming from this decision to do away with the endangerment finding they'll be fine.

Most people aren't like that, so most people will not be fine. On that note, can you talk about workers, jobs, and what we might be looking at?

JASON WALSH: Yeah. so, so there's, yeah, there's another way in which Trump's EPA is essentially cheating at math. EPA did not release a jobs analysis with, with this final rule, which they've typically done in the past for, for, for final rules. They, claimed it was too speculative. That's their word to estimate the jobs impacts.

But that's an odd rationale to use when at the same time they speculatively estimated \$1.3 trillion in savings from the rollback. I think the real reason, Monica, is that they don't want to talk about the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are currently in the clean vehicle supply chain in the United States.

There are more than 410,000 workers in the US making technologies to reduce emissions and improve fuel economy for vehicles. Over the last couple of decades, 240,000 manufacturing jobs had been announced in the EV supply chain alone. That's a lot. And to be clear, these jobs were created in part by EPA pollution standards, which pushed US automakers to innovate and to invest in new technologies and in new product lines and in new vehicles. All of that new economic activity created a bunch of jobs. Ending these pollution standards has the opposite effect.



And it goes hand in hand with a whole other set of policies, with the destruction by Congress last year of Inflation Reduction Act tax incentives and direct investments in clean vehicles and efforts by the Trump administration that are ongoing at agencies like the Department of Energy and the Department of Transportation, including EPA, to sabotage programs and projects, many of them already awarded by the way and under contract, that were intended to help build the domestic EV market and onshore the manufacturing of its components.

Perhaps most impactfully, the Republican Budget Reconciliation Bill, the very misnamed One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which was passed last July and signed into law by President Trump. It killed the \$7,500 consumer tax credit to purchase EVs. This was originally a 10-year tax credit in the Inflation Reduction Act with requirements for North American made battery components and North American source critical minerals, which gave manufacturers assurance, or so we thought, that there would be consistent long-term demand pull for EVs and a mechanism for closing the price gap as EV technologies get more efficient and industry achieves economies of scale over time.

This 10-year credit was abruptly ended at the end of last September. The following month, new sales, new purchases of EVs dropped by about half. Just two months later, in November, the battery maker Ultium sells in Lordstown, Ohio, where workers are represented by the United Auto Workers, one of our coalition partners, laid off 850 workers. GM cut 1,200 jobs at its factory zero in Michigan. Ford's Kentucky EV plant will lay off 1,600 workers. The list goes on. In addition, companies that had announced big investments to build new EV and battery manufacturing facilities in the US are starting to reverse.

So to name just one example, an Australian company for TesQ, which is one of the many non-US based companies that were planning to onshore EV manufacturing in the US based mostly on incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act, announced, this was last year, that they are going to cancel a \$210 million EV battery plan into Detroit. And the reason they gave was, quote, current policy. This was just after the budget reconciliation vote.

MONICA DE BOLLE: So this is very interesting, Jason, because in the end, what you're saying is as it pertains to the auto sector and EVs in particular, what is already happening is that we are seeing companies, foreign companies, who are willing to invest in the US, who are willing to bring their business to the US and thus create jobs in the US. Everything that this administration says it defends, but this sort of public policy



action or in this case, the revocation of the endangerment finding is actually going against the administration's stated objectives when we look at things like the case of the Australian company you just cited.

JASON WALSH: That's exactly right. And we have a wealth of data, which we don't have time to get into on this call, just about how much new capital investment started flowing in to the United States after the passage of the inflation reduction act in 2022. It's actually quite stunning. And if you look at it in graphs, it really stands out. I'll just name one data point.

The IRA was passed in 2022. 2022 and 2023 saw the greatest acceleration in construction of manufacturing facilities in the United States in a generation. At the beginning of 2021, US firms were investing \$76 billion a month building new manufacturing operations. By the end of 2023, they were investing \$230 billion monthly. So this was taking off.

And then we got the 2024 election and what has been a series of policy changes. I would actually call it a policy whiplash that has turned the auto market on its head. And one way to look at it is to look at the big three, right? The big three automaker, US based automakers. And if you total up the economic hit that the big three have taken since the Trump administration started this attack on EVs, it comes to about \$50 billion.

That's the combined amount of write downs being taken by GM Ford Stellantis that we know of. Now, none of this data made it into EPA's analysis, unsurprisingly or Trump and Zeldin's announcement at the White House. But the bottom line is that the administration's vehicle policies are a jobs killer in addition to being a literal killer.

MONICA DE BOLLE: So, and this is a very important point because we've been very, very concerned and we see the headlines every day about concerns over labor market repercussions of artificial intelligence adoption. And yet with some of these actions that have been taken that we've been discussing here, we are already seeing the job losses though they're not coming from AI, they're coming from actual policy decisions themselves. And when you mentioned the large reductions in investment, large reductions in investment translate to large reductions in jobs potentially. So we're looking at jobs being eliminated now and jobs being eliminated in the future, correct?

JASON WALSH: Correct. So to sum up what you just laid out very clearly, They are killing a set of policy decisions and investments that were creating hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs in this country and construction jobs, building all these



new facilities. And now they are pivoting to artificial intelligence, which among other consequences has holds the danger of eliminating millions of American jobs.

So for a president who likes to talk about jobs and how he's growing jobs, the irony is kind of intense. also want to make a point about how this decision on the endangerment finding in combination with the other policy changes I've mentioned will make the United States less competitive in the global economy, a topic you know a lot about. EPA standards have historically served as a counter to the strong incentives faced by automakers to pursue short-term profits at the expense of their long-term market position.

They get the biggest profit margin by units sold from selling gas guzzling SUVs and trucks, which shareholders love and Wall Street analysts love. But in doing so, they lose the future. In China, the future's already arrived. So while Trump kneecaps the US auto industry, Chinese manufacturing, it's producing EVs at an incredible scale. Half of all new vehicles sold in China last year over 11 million vehicles were EVs. And it's not just China. Last year, more than one quarter of cars sold worldwide were electric. That was last year. The trend will only accelerate. So IEA, the International Energy Agency, does a global EV outlook. Their estimate for EV sales in 2030 are that more...than 40% of vehicles sold globally will be electric. In China, it's 80%. In Europe, it's 60%. Those are the market drivers. By 2040, Bloomberg New Energy Finance estimates roughly 70% of new passenger vehicle sales will be EVs.

So to be clear, stepping back, from pollution regulation here in the United States is not gonna stop other countries from continuing to innovate in the vehicle space. The global demand for electric vehicles is growing, as I just described. And if U.S. manufacturing fails to keep up with the rest of the globe, where consumers are spending their money, they will risk losing market share globally and here at home. Ford CEO, Jim Farley, put this in even more stark terms last year. He said, we are in a global competition with China. And if we lose this, we do not have a future at Ford. And of course, if the US falls behind, not only will the future of the auto industry be built elsewhere, but America's manufacturing workers will lose jobs and lose livelihoods. And they already are.

MONICA DE BOLLE: Yeah, this is all. So you've basically answered the question I had for you next. So I have to now ask you something else, which is where do we go from here?



JASON WALSH: Well, good question. When I ask myself every day, I am not sure we're going to change the minds of the Trump administration. So, so, we are hoping for a better political landscape and some better policy making over the next couple of years here. I mean, I do think: Look, if anything is going to save us here, it will be how quickly the technology costs are coming down the cost curve, right? So, as we've just talked about, right, the consumer tax credit, in part, that was to basically close the cost premium.

In 2020, five lithium ion battery pack prices fell 8%, which is a new record low. This happened despite some temporary volatility in raw material markets. Analysts at Bloomberg expect further reductions in 2026. That's going to bring costs closer to parity with internal combustion engines and enable more accessible pricing for light duty electric vehicles. So just in terms of technology innovation, because the big three will continue, we hope, to invest in this technology, that's very promising. I think the other thing to just to name is the states, right?

The federal government is not the only the only policy maker in this space. It is also the states, none more important than the state of California, which is also, you know, I last I checked the fifth biggest economy in the world. Now, what we haven't talked about is the Trump administration is trying to cripple California's ability to set their own clean car standards precisely because it is so important as a market shaper. And that battle will be fought in courts as well.

But California and other states have the ability to put laws on the books that continue to create demand pull for electric vehicles, continue to invest in clean technology, clean vehicle manufacturing, and actually create enormous headaches for automakers who, I mean, again, this is part of the irony, Like automakers like consistency across markets. Their horror show is like 50 different, a patchwork of 50 different standards across the country or even 15, 20, 25. That's their horror show. And in rolling back the federal endangerment finding, the Trump administration may have created that scenario.

MONICA DE BOLLE: Thank you so much, Jason, for coming on the show and giving us a very sobering assessment of what we're looking at. Although there's some hope as you've underscored, but I think, broadly speaking, this is what we should be concerned first and foremost if we're at all preoccupied with jobs and where the economy is going and so on. So thank you so much for coming in on Policy for the Planet.

JASON WALSH: Monica, thanks for having me. It's been a real pleasure.



MONICA DE BOLLE: And that’s a wrap! Not only for this episode and season, but also for Policy for the Planet.

Thank you to every guest who shared hard-earned insight and expertise, to our listeners who showed up with interest and curiosity, and to the team behind the mic who turned research and conviction into a conversation that matters greatly in these uncertain times.

You built this community — scientists, advocates, policymakers, students, and everyday people who believe that policy can help build a healthier, more humane planet.

If this podcast moved you, please keep it alive: share episodes with someone who needs to hear them; follow our work at PIIE by signing up for our newsletter and watching our online events; bring these ideas into your meetings and workplaces; and consider supporting independent climate policy analysis in your area.

We may be signing off, but the work continues. Stay curious, stay engaged, and keep pushing for policy that protects people and the planet. From all of us at Policy for the Planet — thank you, and onward.