Reflections on the Current State of United States Climate Policy

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Main points of this presentation

- US climate policy is deeply partisan
- High-level debate is mostly about symbols not substance
- Large-scale trends in US energy production and consumption are separate from much of the public and partisan debate
US public opinion

- **Politicization of science funding**

- **Ups and downs of climate worry**

The chart on the right illustrates the political divides over support for more scientific research funding. The percentage of U.S. adults who say they would increase federal spending for scientific research has grown over time, with Democrats and Independents showing a rising trend, whereas Republicans and Independents show a decreasing trend. The chart is sourced from a survey conducted April 5-11, 2017, by PEW Research Center.
Environmental issues are partisan in Congress

The Great Divide

With an average 85 percent voting gap between Republicans and Democrats in 2016, Congress has never been so polarized over environmental issues.

LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS’ ENVIRONMENTAL VOTING SCORES
U.S. Congress, by chamber and party, 1970-2016

- **REPUBLICANS**
  - HOUSE
  - SENATE

- **DEMOCRATS**
  - HOUSE
  - SENATE

SOURCE: League of Conservation Voters
PAUL HORN / InsideClimate News
Climate policy as symbolic politics
Keystone XL Pipeline as a key symbol

Obama alumnus: Should have built Keystone

Adam Sieminski, who was administrator of the Energy Department’s Energy Information Administration under President Obama, says with a laugh that now he’s left the government, he can have an opinion again. On the sidelines of a Brookings Institution confab in D.C. on Monday, he told Axios:

“One opinion I don't have to stifle anymore is that I think the Keystone XL pipeline should have been built.

Why it matters now: With Republicans in control of the White House and both chambers of Congress, some Democrats might find it more politically possible to take positions that go counter to certain liberal causes, such as opposing fossil-fuel infrastructure like Keystone, which could lead to more bipartisan energy policy.

Our thought bubble: During the seven-year Keystone XL saga (which ultimately led Obama to reject it in November 2015), many Obama administration officials privately said the fight was a distraction and the pipeline should be approved. In the end though, symbolic climate politics won out over pragmatic energy policy.
Long-term trends in US energy

U.S. electric power sector comparison of coal and natural gas (1990-2015)

- Electricity generation (billion kilowatthours):
  - Coal: Increased from 2.5 in 1990 to 0 in 2015
  - Natural gas: Increased from 0 in 1990 to 2.5 in 2015

- Energy consumption (quadrillion Btu):
  - Coal: Decreased from 25 in 1990 to 0 in 2015
  - Natural gas: Increased from 0 in 1990 to 25 in 2015

- CO2 emissions (billion metric tons):
  - Coal: Decreased from 2.5 in 1990 to 0 in 2015
  - Natural gas: Increased from 0 in 1990 to 2.5 in 2015

Natural gas consumes less fuel per unit of electricity generation.
Natural gas emits less carbon dioxide per unit of electricity generation.
Impact of Trump cancellation of Clean Power Plan?

U.S. net electricity generation (1980-2040)

- History
- Projections

With Clean Power Plan (Reference case)
- Natural gas
- Renewables
- Coal
- Nuclear
- Petroleum

No Clean Power Plan

Projections
Proportion of Global Energy Consumption from Carbon-Free Sources: 1965-2015

Source: BP, R. Pielke
Looking Ahead - 2017, global CO₂ increase?

India admits it will miss coal emissions targets

Power minister takes swipe at west but acknowledges power plants will not meet goals

By Saleem Shaikh

ISLAMABAD (The Express Tribune) - Mr. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the Federal Minister for Water Resources, New and Renewable Energy, and Power, laid into the west today, saying that the country would not meet its power targets.

The power minister said that the country's seemingly healthy power statistics were built on the back of energy imports from Pakistan, which would not be possible much longer as the country was running out of fuel.

Abbasi cited the example of China which was now the world's largest emitter of CO₂, saying that its previous leader was accused of being the world's largest emitter.

That is the S$4 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which includes spending of about

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Final thoughts on US climate policy

- US climate policy is highly uncertain, mainly because it is a partisan issue and US political situation is fluid;
- Because of the focus on politics there is a possibility that Trump Administration ultimately does not matter much for energy & climate policy;
- Larger trends likely to continue to dominate (e.g., markets, prices, technology, etc.);
- But, can US climate advocates who wish to accelerate decarbonization de-politicize the issue for 2020 and beyond in order to better focus on policy over politics?
Thank you

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