

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

**Teleconference Remarks to Public Health Organizations on the
Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan**

June 2, 2014

Thanks, Gina. And thanks to all the folks at EPA who worked so hard to put this plan forward. I want to thank everybody who is on the call. We're going to be talking about carbon pollution and the standards that we proposed this morning.

I think a lot of people are aware of the climate action plan that I put forward last year based on what we know, which is that climate change is real. It has impacts not just in a distant future. It has serious impacts, as we speak. And what the EPA and Gina has been able to put forward, based on conversations they've had with a wide range of stakeholders from businesses to workers to many of the health organizations that are on the phone today, what she's been able to do with her team is to craft a sensible, State-based plan that provides States a wide range of options in terms of achieving their goals, but makes sure that we are reducing the carbon pollution that hurts the health of our kids and the health of the planet, while also giving us enormous opportunities to grow and improve the economy in all sorts of ways.

Now, up until now, there have been no national limits on the amount of carbon pollution that existing power plants can pump into the air. In contrast, we limit the amount of toxic chemicals like mercury and sulfur and arsenic that power plants put into our air and water. And the essence of the plan that the EPA is presenting makes sure that we're finally doing the same with carbon.

Since carbon emissions are a major contributor to climate change and since power plants are responsible for about 40 percent of America's carbon pollution, these new standards are going to help us leave our children a safer and more stable world.

And since air pollution from power plants actually worsens asthma and other breathing problems, putting these guidelines in place will help protect the health of vulnerable Americans, including children and the elderly.

And I just want to give one example. I got a letter from Dian Coleman, who is a mother of four. Her three kids have asthma. Her daughter has a congenital health defect. She keeps her home free of dust that can trigger asthma attacks. Cigarettes aren't allowed across the threshold of her home. But despite all that, she can't control the pollution that contributes potentially to her kids' illnesses, as well as threatening the planet. We've got to make sure that we're doing something on behalf of Dian and doing it in a way that allows us also to grow the economy and get at the forefront of our clean energy future.

And the health issues that we're talking about hit some communities particularly hard. African American children are twice as likely to be hospitalized for asthma, four times as likely to die from asthma. Latinos are 30 percent more likely to be hospitalized for asthma. So these proposed standards will help us meet that challenge head on. It sets carbon targets, give States and regions the flexibility to meet them, using the mix of energy resources that work best for them, whether it's natural gas or cleaner coal or solar or wind or hydropower or geothermal or nuclear. And it provides a huge incentive for the States and consumers to become more energy efficient.

As a result, your electricity bills will shrink as these standards spur investment in energy efficiency, cutting waste. And ultimately, we're going to be saving money for homes and for businesses.

Now, I promise you, you will hear from critics who say the same thing they always say: that these guidelines will kill jobs or crush the economy. What we've seen every time is that these claims are debunked when you actually give workers and businesses the tools and the incentive they need to innovate. When Americans are called on to innovate, that's what we do, whether it's making more fuel-efficient cars or more fuel-efficient appliances or making sure that we are putting in place the kinds of equipment that prevents harm to the ozone layer and eliminates acid rain. At every one of these steps, there have been folks who have said it can't be done. There have been naysayers who said this is going to destroy jobs and destroy industry.

And it doesn't happen because once we have a clear target to meet, we typically meet it. And we find the best ways to do it.

And by the way, the idea of setting higher standards to cut carbon is not new. A lot of companies are already moving to lower carbon energy sources. You've got more than a dozen States that are already implementing market-based programs to reduce carbon pollution. Over a thousand mayors have agreed to cut their cities' carbon emissions.

Today, carbon emissions are at the lowest they've been in about 20 years. And that's a good start. But it's just not good enough when you look at the projections of where we're going. And for the sake of our children, we're going to have to do more. In America, we do not have to choose between the health of our economy and the health of our kids. We can do both.

And you should expect that there's going to be a heated debate in Washington. There's going to be a lot of efforts to put out misinformation and to try to make sure that spin overwhelms substance and that PR overwhelms science. But I wanted to call you directly so you guys hear from me directly: This is something that is important for all of us, as parents, as grandparents, as citizens, as folks who care about the health of our families and also want to make sure that future generations are able to enjoy this beautiful blue ball in the middle of space that we're a part of. So I just want you to all join in and work hard to build momentum for these plans because this the right direction to go in and it's going to mean a better future for America.

And if we're working together, I guarantee you we can build that cleaner, healthier, and more prosperous future. So thanks very much, everybody. Bye-bye.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Regina McCarthy; and Winchester, VA, resident Dian Coleman. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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