

Evangelicals add support for EPA plan to cut coal pollution

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Evangelicals are teaming up with environmentalists to support the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan to substantially reduce carbon dioxide emissions from coal-burning power plants.

Mitchell Hescox, president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network, submitted comments from more than 100,000 "pro-life Christians" who he said are concerned about children's health problems that are linked to unclean air and water.

"From acid rain to mercury to carbon, the coal utility industry has never acted as a good neighbor and cleaned up their mess on their own," Hescox told reporters on Monday (December 1). "Instead of acting for the benefit of our children's lives, they've internalized their profits while our kids (have) borne the cost in their brains, lungs and lives."

Despite recent findings that almost four in 10 evangelicals remain skeptical about climate change, Hescox said the comments he provided to the Environmental Protection Agency reflect a belief that "climate change is the greatest moral challenge of our time."

Hescox joined the nonprofit business group Environmental Entrepreneurs in submitting public comments to the EPA as it develops regulations to cut carbon pollution by 30 percent from 2005 levels.

"Acting on climate change, cutting carbon—this isn't something that knows politics or religion or business or occupation," said Bob Keefe, executive director of Environmental Entrepreneurs. "It's something that's good for America. It's good for our economy. It's good for our environment."

But as Republicans are preparing to take full control of Capitol Hill next month, GOP officials and coal industry executives say the EPA's plans are too costly.

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told the Lexington Herald-Leader after his re-election in coal-heavy Kentucky that he feels a "deep responsibility" to halt the EPA's plans on regulating emissions.

"It makes me very angry, and I'm going to do everything I can to try to stop them," he told the newspaper.

Coal industry leaders have said research commissioned by the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, a coal industry lobbying group, shows the EPA plan will increase costs while having a minimal effect on climate change.

"Asking Americans to pay more in return for less energy and fewer jobs is not a plan that provides them the economic security they deserve," said Hal Quinn, president and CEO of the National Mining Association.