

**CAREERS****Do Climate Policies 'Kill Jobs'?**

An economist explains why climate policies don't cause massive unemployment

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*The Conversation*

Climate change will hammer the U.S. economy unless there's swift action to rein in greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels, according to the latest National Climate Assessment report.

But President Donald Trump has dismissed this forecast, even though his own administration released a comprehensive synthesis of the best available science, written by hundreds of climate scientists and other experts from academia, government, the private sector and non-profits. Like most opponents of policies aimed at slowing the pace of climate change, he has long wanted actions to reduce these emissions off the table because, in his opinion, they are "job-killing."

As an environmental economist who is studying the relationship between regulations and employment, I find this question vitally important both economically and politically. What does the research on this question say?

**Arguments**

Opponents of climate regulations embrace a straightforward and

long-standing argument. In their view, anything the government forces businesses to do will negatively affect their ability to employ workers. To them, everything from safety regulations to raising taxes makes it costlier and harder for businesses to operate.

Trump has taken this philosophy to heart by pledging to eliminate what he calls "job-killing regulations" across the board.

Some supporters of strong climate policies counter that the costs of climate change are high enough to justify climate policies even though they might negatively affect workers.

They base this argument on observations that environmental rules and clean energy can benefit public health, even by saving lives. They also point out that these policies could counter the economic damage the National Climate Assessment forecasts.

**Evidence**

What about those jobs, though?

The evidence on how environmental policies affect unemployment is generally mixed. The book "Does Regulation Kill Jobs?," edited by University of Pennsyl-

vania professor Cary Coglianese, covers regulations generally. It concludes that "regulation overall is neither a prime job killer nor a key job creator."

Michael Greenstone, a University of Chicago economist, found that 1970s-era environmental regulations, which in some ways resemble the climate-related rules debated today, led to the loss of more than half-a-million manufacturing jobs over 15 years.

Another team of researchers, which reviewed the impact of environmental policies on four heavily polluting industries, found that environmental regulations have no significant effect on employment.

To be sure, the number of coal mining jobs has plummeted, falling from over 150,000 in the 1980s to about 53,000 in July 2018.

But this mainly has to do with two other factors. Due to increasing automation, it now takes far fewer workers to mine coal than it used to.

And a drilling boom has increased not just oil output but natural gas production. The increased natural gas supply cut prices for that fuel, prompting a raft of



coal-fired power plant closures. It also eroded coal's market share for electricity generation while creating new jobs in other energy industries.

**Greener job growth**

A weakness I often see in the standard regulations-kill-jobs argument is a focus on the regulated industries that ignores the fact that those same regulations tend to spur growth in other industries.

In this case, climate policies are proving to be a boon for jobs in renewable energy industries like wind and solar, as well as in efficiency efforts like weatherization.

For example, the stimulus bill enacted during the Great Recession included provisions designed to bolster renewable energy.

That spending helped spur the creation of millions of new jobs. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, a federal agency, predicts that the number of solar panel installers will increase by 105 percent and the number of wind turbine technician jobs will rise by 96 percent between 2016 and 2026, making those the nation's two fastest-growing professions.

The power the U.S. gets from wind, which increased more than 30-fold between 1999 and

2017, now accounts for 6.3 percent of total electricity.

One study concluded that retraining all coal workers to become solar panel installers is feasible and in fact would mean a raise for most of these American workers. More than twice as many Americans work in the solar energy industry than in the coal industry.

**The whole employment picture**

So what is the net effect on jobs when some energy industries shrink and others grow?

Resources for the Future, a think tank that researches economic, environmental, energy and natural resource issues, has developed complex computational models of the economy that clarify the whole picture on the connection between regulations and jobs.

The nonprofit, nonpartisan group assessed the impact on unemployment, something that – believe it or not – these large-scale economic simulations usually don't do.

The think tank predicts that a hypothetical US\$40 per ton carbon tax, which would translate into an increase of about 36 cents per gallon of gasoline, would increase the overall unemployment rate by just 0.3 percentage points. The

effect is even smaller, at just 0.05 percentage points, if the government were to use the carbon tax's revenue to cut other tax rates.

This effect is one-third as large as previous estimates, such as a 2017 study from NERA Economic Consulting, a global firm, that were not as detailed in their unemployment modeling.

Some studies have even detected a net gain in jobs from climate policies.

For example, University of California, Berkeley researchers found that California's efforts to cut emissions have bolstered the state's economy and created more than 37,000 jobs. And the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Political Economy Research Institute has determined that every \$1 million shifted from fossil fuel-generated power to "green energy" creates a net increase of 5 jobs.

Based on my review of the research, I see little evidence that policies to reduce pollution from fossil fuels have or will likely result in widespread job losses.

**Different options**

Different types of policies can have different effects – and some can minimize labor market disruption more than others.

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**Briefs** cont'd from pg 7**Vancouver Juneteenth Celebration Includes Diversity Job Fair***Job fair booths still available*

Vancouver NAACP is hosting the 7th Annual Vancouver and Clark County Juneteenth Celebration June 22. Juneteenth is the oldest known event celebrating the end of slavery on June 19, 1865, two and a half years after Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth focuses on celebrating freedom, recognizing African American achievements and encouraging continuous self-development and

respect for all cultures.

The event takes place from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Clark College, Hanna and Foster Halls, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.

Events include an art gallery, writer's forum, special musical performance by David Watson and Rebirthing the Cool, kid's corner, food and community vendors, as well as a diversity job fair from 10 a.m. to noon.

Employers interested in sponsoring a booth at the job fair should contact Carol Collier, NAACP Branch 1139 Treasurer and Job Fair Chairperson at (503) 880-5807 or contact NAACP Vancouver at [naacpvancouver@gmail.com](mailto:naacpvancouver@gmail.com).