



US pushes to revoke scientific ruling that underpins climate regulations

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Washington (AFP) – President Donald Trump's administration on Tuesday moved to reverse a foundational scientific determination that underpins the US government's authority to limit greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles and, more broadly, to combat climate change.

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Speaking at an auto dealership in Indianapolis, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin argued that the 2009 Endangerment Finding was based on flawed reasoning and had inflicted serious economic harm.

"If finalized, today's announcement would amount to the largest deregulatory action in the history of the United States," said the former Republican congressman.

He was joined by Energy Secretary Chris Wright, a former fracking company CEO, whose department published a climate science study cited in the EPA action.

The proposed reversal -- first announced in March -- will be subject to a 45-day public comment period and is certain to face legal challenges.

While Zeldin cast the move as a way to undo what he called the "Biden-Harris administration's electric vehicle (EV) mandate," revoking the Endangerment Finding could also unravel the legal basis for a wide array of climate regulations, including those on power plants and oil and gas operations.

In his remarks, Zeldin accused the EPA under former president Barack Obama, a Democrat, of making "mental leaps" in determining that heat-trapping gases posed a threat to public health and welfare.

The EPA said in a press release that the finding had "been used to justify over \$1 trillion in regulations" and undoing it would save \$54 billion annually.

A 302-page document outlining the rationale for the revocation makes a number of bold claims around climate science, including the assertion that "extreme weather events have not demonstrably increased relative to historical highs," citing the Energy Department report.

It also speaks about the "beneficial impacts" of carbon emissions on plant growth and agricultural productivity.

The Endangerment Finding was grounded in overwhelming scientific consensus and peer-reviewed research. It followed a landmark 2007 Supreme Court ruling that found greenhouse gases qualify as air pollutants under the Clean Air Act and directed the EPA to revisit its position.

Transportation accounts for 28 percent of US greenhouse gas emissions -- more than any other sector.

If it were a country, the US transportation sector would rank as the fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases globally, while the power sector would be fifth.

Legal battle looms

Environmental groups and states are expected to swiftly sue. The case could ultimately reach the Supreme Court, which may need to overturn its own 2007 precedent to side with the current Republican administration.

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"Hopefully they will recognize that this is science and not politics -- that there was a good reason for that precedent and no good reason to revoke it," said Becker. "But this is a very political court."

He added that the administration's cost-saving arguments were misleading, pointing to official data showing that rules now targeted for repeal saved the average American driver \$6,000 in fuel and maintenance over the lifetime of vehicles built under the standards.

Camille Pannu, an environmental law specialist at Columbia University, told AFP the Trump administration had failed to present robust legal arguments grounded in scientific evidence in its proposal.

"I think they're hoping they can just refuse to regulate for four years and do crazy things during that time while it's all tied up in court," she said.

Since returning to office, Trump has withdrawn the US from the Paris Agreement and launched a sweeping campaign to expand fossil fuel development.

The announcement comes as tens of millions of Americans are baking under a brutal heat dome in the Southeast, while climate-fueled flooding earlier this month killed more than 100 people in Texas.

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