

Testimony of Claire Gervais, MD
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Hello, my name is Dr. Claire Gervais. I am a Family Medicine physician representing Physician's for Social Responsibility and Wisconsin Environmental Health Network, as well as being an active member of the Sierra Club. I care for a broad spectrum of citizens of all ages, including children and adults with asthma, heart disease, strokes, and cancers.

As a physician, I am opposed to the so-called "Affordable Clean Energy" proposal or "ACE". ACE is projected to cause an estimated 4,500 premature deaths annually by 2030, up to 15,000 new cases of respiratory problems, while also increasing heart attacks, strokes, cancer, developmental and neurological problems. Health effects are caused in part by exposure to soot and smog, which comes from the combustion of coal releasing fine particles, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury, and numerous other noxious substances.

Research shows more and more links between these hazardous substances and human health. In fact, just last month there was an article published in the Journal of American Medical Association or JAMA showing the association of prenatal exposure to particulate matter in air pollution and fetal thyroid function.

Climate change is another significant consequence of burning coal. There are numerous health effects of climate change, including heat injuries, increased vector born diseases including West Nile and Zika viruses, increased asthma and allergies, and mental health issues due to displacement of populations.

Demographically, coal fired power plants are often located in areas of lower socioeconomic class, putting vulnerable populations, including communities of color, at more risk. Some of the dirtiest coal plants are located in some of our largest metropolitan areas.

Though touted as more "affordable", financial loss occurs as a result of the health effects caused by pollution. When people are ill, health care costs rise and days of work are missed. ACE clearly does not account for these societal costs. Additionally, housing values have been shown to be lower in neighborhoods near coal-fired power plants.

Furthermore, ACE misrepresents the economical benefits of the sustainable energy industry. Jobs are created to support the infrastructure of designing, building, maintaining and operating sustainable equipment. In fact, sustainable energy employs more people than the fossil fuel industry.

Given the momentum of the sustainable energy industry, ACE seems irrelevant. However, the impact of ACE would be felt in states where the development of sustainable energy has been thwarted in favor of coal-fired power plants, some who are still spewing toxins despite technology to retrofit them and mitigate emissions. These states and the dirtiest coal plants would no longer have the incentive to change.

Before Richard Nixon's 1970 version of the Clean Air Act and creation of the EPA, I remember as a child travelling by train through Gary, Indiana and seeing an orange sky and smelling a putrid odor through this corridor of industrial pollutants. Besides a visibly cleaner sky, the Clean Air Act has inspired innovation and saved millions of lives from premature death, worsening asthma, and heart disease. ACE moves us backward, to an era of "Mad Men", where smoking in the board room and the doctor's lounge was acceptable.

In this sense, ACE is symbolic of the very "old school" divisions between the fossil fuel industry and public health as well as illustrative of the relationship between politicians and industry. The EPA needs to get away from this dangerous dirty energy plan and get back to its mission "to protect human and environmental health" by promoting policies that incentivize a clean energy future.

Thanks you for this opportunity to testify.