



Editorial: Let's move on from EPA challenge

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Now that a federal appeals court has ruled that the EPA has clear authority to pursue tougher rules on greenhouse gas emissions, Texas must stop the foot-dragging and begin planning a cleaner-energy future.

The unanimous ruling last week leaves little wiggle room for climate skeptics such as Gov. Rick Perry and Attorney General Greg Abbott, who led the state down this litigious dead end by questioning the EPA's scientific judgment. Even after being shut down by the court, Abbott called the ruling "deeply disappointing" and accused the judges of failing "to rein in the unelected bureaucrats at the [environmental] agency who are holding our country's energy independence and fragile economy hostage to a radical environmental agenda." He said Texas is still considering appeals options.

Frankly, the state would be better served if it spent less time in court and more time making sure Texas is ready for the future. Cleaner energy is crucial to this nation's future, and Texas, a heavy energy-producing and -consuming state, can't remain economically competitive if it continues to fight scientifically sound progress. In its opinion, the appeals court showed obvious irritation with the state's challenge, noting brusquely: "This is how science works. The EPA is not required to re-prove the existence of the atom every time it approaches a scientific question."

Texas was the only state to refuse to cooperate when the agency began requiring states to apply for greenhouse gas permits. Others since have moved to comply while Texas squandered time in a losing legal fight.

No doubt tougher rules on greenhouse gases will affect Texas' coal-fired power plants as well as farmers and ranchers who use fossil fuels to cultivate their land and fertilize their crops. This puts an added responsibility on Texas to take the right steps to make sure new clean-energy jobs are created.

Texas can't pretend that the rules shouldn't apply in this state. Texas consumes and produces more electricity than any other state, and per capita residential use is significantly higher than the national average. About 35 percent of all greenhouse gases released by industrial sources in the United States originate in Texas, much of it from the state's prominent energy sector. The rules aren't optional, and tethering ourselves to a 20th-century approach in the 21st century would be a disastrous economic miscalculation.

Texas should be at the forefront of efforts to reduce emissions that both endanger health and discourage businesses from locating or expanding in the state. Instead of opposing the tougher air quality rules, Austin would be wise to focus instead on how best to be a leader in a less carbon-dependent and cleaner economy.

Path to cleaner air

2007: The Supreme Court rules that heat-trapping greenhouse gases blamed for global warming can be controlled as air pollutants.

2009: The EPA concludes the gases endanger human health, triggering controls on automobiles and large industrial facilities.

2010: Texas sues the EPA in federal court to prevent regulation of greenhouse gases.

June 2012: A federal appeals court upholds the EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gases.

