

**ILLINOIS EDITORIAL BOARD/OPINION PAGE BRIEFER:**

**ILLINOIS'S STAKE IN EPA POWER  
PLANT STANDARDS:  
LESS CARBON, 7,800 MORE JOBS,  
\$13.8 MILLION SAVED MONTHLY ON ELECTRIC BILLS**

*Prepared by the Natural Resources Defense Council  
July 2013*

**OVERVIEW**

Illinois has a significant interest in the plan President Obama laid out on June 25<sup>th</sup> in his [national climate change initiative](#), a detailed approach to confronting the central environmental crisis of our time. As you consider how best to address this issue for your readers, viewers and audience, we hope this information will help.

Illinois's children and their children deserve to grow up in a world not plagued by climate disruption that takes lives, decimates communities, destroys businesses, harms the economy and costs fortunes to clean up. But today that is their future.

Americans agree that we have an obligation to protect these future generations. They feel urgency because of the climate disruption they're already seeing, and they're growing more concerned about climate change, a new Natural Resources Defense Council [poll](#) shows. The president's plan offers solutions that will help, and deserve support.

Through a series of executive actions, his plan seeks to prepare the U.S. for the impacts of climate change, to invest more in energy efficiency and renewable wind and solar energy, to lead international efforts to address climate change, and to go after carbon pollution from the nation's power plants—a key driver of climate change.

**Predictably, the usual critics piped up:**

The critics, as expected, have said that the president's climate action plan—the only credible solution any policymaker in Washington has put on the table—will result in “punishing Americans with higher bills (and) fewer jobs.”

Such doom and gloom is typical, and typically wrong. It overlooks American ingenuity, and our resolve to work together for the good of the nation.

**Here's the truth:**

Instead of letting climate change continue wreaking havoc with every freak storm, every drought, every heat wave, every wildfire, Illinois residents can protect their communities *and* create new jobs. They can grow the economy *and* breathe cleaner air that doesn't worsen children's asthma, and leave people coughing and missing work.

The Clean Air Act gives the president the authority—and duty—to go after the biggest source of pollution driving climate change, the nation's power plants. They kick out 40 percent of U.S. carbon pollution.

As the president said, “We limit the amount of toxic chemicals like mercury and sulfur and arsenic in our air or our water, but power plants can still dump unlimited amounts of carbon pollution into the air for free. That’s not right, that’s not safe, and it needs to stop.”

Last December, NRDC outlined how the nation can curb this dangerous carbon pollution by 26 percent by 2020.

NRDC’s proposal shows how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can set state-specific standards limiting pollution. Then states and power companies would work together, with maximum flexibility, to achieve the goals at a low cost, and the total costs would be only about 1 percent of industry revenues.

For more on this approach, go [here](#).

### ***We can cut carbon, create jobs, save money***

In early July this year, NRDC followed up with an analysis showing that this approach also could **create 210,000 new jobs** across the country, while also **saving consumers money on their electric bills**.

Most of these jobs would arise from investments to upgrade the energy efficiency of homes and offices. That means hiring more electricians, heating and air conditioning installers, carpenters, construction equipment operators, roofers, insulation specialists, and building inspectors.

For more on NRDC’s climate jobs analysis, go [here](#).

## **ILLINOIS CLIMATE IMPACT AND BENEFITS FROM POWER PLANT STANDARDS**

Taking action on climate presents an opportunity to address climatic and economic forces that are having a major impact on Illinois.

### **The problem Illinois residents have an obligation to address:**

- Illinois released 105 million tons of carbon pollution from its power plants in 2011, making it the 6<sup>th</sup> most polluting state in the nation, according to a report benchmarking air emissions from the 100 largest electricity providers. For more, go [here](#).
- \$ 4.5 billion in federal taxes Illinois residents paid in 2012 went to clean up after extreme weather.

### **Impacts from climate change Illinois is already seeing:**

- In 2012, [Illinois](#) experienced 113 broken heat records, 36 broken precipitation records, and 1 large wildfire.
- As of 2013, [asthma](#) sickens about 223,549 children and 796,337 adults. Climate change, driven by rising carbon pollution, leads to higher concentrations of ground-level ozone (smog) and smog is a pollutant that aggravates asthma.
- Climate change will worsen smog and causes plants to produce more pollen pollution, increasing respiratory health threats, particularly for people with allergies and asthma. [All counties](#) in Illinois suffer from ragweed pollution and 12 have high unhealthy smog levels.
- Chicago, Illinois is ranked among the [10 most soot-polluted cities](#) in the country, threatening public health.

- Combined sewer overflows due to heavy rains threaten [nearly 110 Illinois communities](#), including Chicago.
- Illinois has been declared a [disaster area 17 times](#) since 2010 due to severe storms and flooding.

#### **Benefits from acting on solutions:**

- Reducing power plant carbon pollution **could create 7,800 new jobs in Illinois**—largely through investments in energy efficiency—**and save an average customer \$2.47 a month** on their electricity bills, NRDC’s jobs analysis shows. See [here](#).
- **Illinois residents could save a total of \$13.8 million per month and up to \$166.4 million every year** on their electricity bills, according to NRDC estimates.

#### **Illinois already leads on clean energy:**

- With 6,618 clean energy jobs announced in 2012, Illinois ranked 4<sup>th</sup> nationally, according to data from Environmental Entrepreneurs, an independent business voice for the environment. For more, go [here](#).
- In 2013, the Illinois Commerce Commission approved accelerated deployment of smart meters to all ComEd customers, creating more than 2,700 manufacturing, service and professional jobs. For more, go [here](#) and search Illinois database.

### **NATIONALLY, UNPRECEDENTED CHANGES IN OUR CLIMATE ARE UNDERWAY**

- Last year was [the hottest year on record](#) in the continental United States - 3.2 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th-Century average.
- U.S. temperatures are predicted to rise (go [here](#) and see Executive Summary) by at least 2 degrees Fahrenheit and as much as 4 degrees Fahrenheit over the next few decade.
- In May, heat-trapping carbon dioxide in our atmosphere reached [400 parts per million](#), the highest level in human history.

#### **They are driving extreme weather**

- Nearly half of the country is experiencing [drought](#), much of it for the third straight year.
- Experts predict [an active hurricane season](#) this year, with up to 6 major hurricanes (the average for normal years is 2).
- [Heat waves](#) are becoming more deadly.
- Wildfires burned [9.3 million acres](#) of forests and fields last year.

#### **These impacts are imposing grievous and growing costs on our country**

- Last year alone, crop losses, flood damage, wildfires and other climate-related disasters cost our country more than \$140 billion. [Taxpayers picked up the lion’s share of the tab](#), to the tune of \$1,100 per taxpayer, on average.

### *And it is threatening our people*

- No wonder [65 percent of Americans](#) say climate change is a serious problem.

### **THE PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL CLIMATE INITIATIVE GOES AFTER THE PROBLEM**

- It promotes needed investment in [efficiency](#), so we can [reduce energy waste](#) and do more with less, and it promotes wind, solar and other renewable power sources.
  - The president's plan sets a goal of doubling wind and solar electricity generation by 2020.
  - It increases funding for clean energy technology across all agencies by 30 percent.
  - It provides up to \$250 million for rural utilities to finance efficiency investments to help reduce energy waste.
  - To make buildings more energy efficient, the plan expands the federal Better Buildings Initiative from commercial buildings to multifamily housing to cut waste.
- And [it takes aim at the heart of the problem](#): the carbon pollution from our power plants. They are the single largest source of the dangerous carbon pollution that is driving climate chaos and extreme weather.
  - Astonishingly there are no federal limits on how much of this pollution our power plants may release. That doesn't make any sense.
  - After all, we limit the amount of mercury, sulfur, arsenic and soot these plants may emit. It's time to set common sense limits on carbon pollution from these plants.

### *Most Americans want action now to protect them from climate change*

- [65 percent](#) support curbing the unlimited power plant carbon pollution and even 39 percent of Republicans back the EPA setting new standards to reduce this climate pollution. (So do 84 percent of Democrats and 56 percent of independents.)

### **It's time to act. It's the least we can do for our children.**

NRDC experts, Dan Lashof, director of NRDC's Climate and Clean Air program, and Laurie Johnson, chief economist in NRDC's Climate and Clean Air program, authored NRDC's reports. Please contact us to speak with them about the costs and the consequences of climate change, and the solutions and their price tags.

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*The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Livingston, Montana, and Beijing. Visit NRDC at <http://www.nrdc.org>.*