The Daily Dish

Biden and Climate Change

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President Biden entered office proclaiming policies toward climate change as his top priority. After a year in office, a spate of articles is highlighting both his accomplishments and shortfalls on the climate front. What is the reality? Fortunately, AAF's Ewelina Czapla has put together a review of the facts.

The president has not been shy about making climate-related commitments. Under his presidency, the United States has rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement and established aggressive national goals for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet with little hope of passing legislation – with the exception of the climate-related funding included in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – the basic strategy has been the use of executive orders (EOs) and regulations to meet targets set on a sector-by-sector basis.

This approach has an obvious drawback: Climate change is a long-term problem that requires strong, durable changes in incentives, while regulations may be modified or even reversed by the next administration. On top of that, the administration's authority to act is often more limited than the sweeping nature of the greenhouse gas emissions challenge. This invites overreach, litigation of the rules, and limbo on policy progress. The poster child for this dynamic is electricity generation regulations, with the Supreme Court scheduled to hear a case finally delineating the scope of this authority.

Czapla does a nice overview of the targets and policies across key sectors: electricity generation and transmission, transportation, industrial emissions, buildings, agriculture and land use, and others. It is a useful summary, but also a testament to the complexity of this approach to reducing emissions.

When all is said and done, Czapla concludes: "Simply rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and producing the United States' nationally determined contribution will do little to mitigate climate change. While the Biden Administration has addressed climate change through

executive orders and regulations, these actions can easily be reversed by future administrations. Meanwhile, the administration's climate priorities have largely not been codified in law, beyond the extension of funding to existing environmental programs in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. It is clear that funding research and the development of innovative climate and energy technologies enjoys bipartisan support, but support for the president's other—and more substantial—policies to mitigate climate change has proved elusive."