

Environmental leaders urge Stefanik to support Clean Power Plan

Maury Thompson, Adirondack Daily Enterprise

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U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-Willsboro

U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-Willsboro (Photo provided by Rep. Elise Stefanik) David Gibson, a regional environmental leader, suggested U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik contact Judith Enck, the former Environmental Protection Agency regional director, as the congresswoman weighs her stance on President Donald Trump's executive order regarding emissions from coal-fired power plants.

"She's (Enck) available on the phone as far as briefing about what was in the plan," said Gibson, a leader of the group Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve.

President Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order to initiate a review of the federal Clean Power Plan and to lift a moratorium on new coal leases on federal lands, among other environmental measures. The Clean Power Plan addresses greenhouse gas emissions at coal-fired power plants.

Stefanik, R-Willsboro, "believes solutions need to be worked through Congress and not done by executive rule," her spokesman Tom Flanagan wrote in an email Tuesday.

However, she is not, at this point, taking a definitive stance on the Trump's executive order.

"Congresswoman Stefanik will be reviewing details of the president's executive order with her colleagues on the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus," Flanagin said.

Stefanik voted to repeal the Clean Power Plan in December 2015, saying it was executive overreach by then-President Barack Obama. She said Obama should have submitted it through Congress and that "we must use free market solutions that balance environmental stewardship with economic growth." Gibson, the environmental leader, supported Stefanik's deliberative approach this week.

"I think the congresswoman is doing the right thing in not reaching quick conclusions here," Gibson said.

Gibson said that if Stefanik speaks with Enck about a presentation Enck made locally about the Clean Power Plan in 2015, the congresswoman would realize the existing Clean Power Plan gives states flexibility about how to achieve goals to reduce carbon emissions. Enck stepped down as EPA regional director in January.

Peter Iwanowicz, executive director of Environmental Advocates of New York, said there is no need for the congresswoman to review the executive order unless she is considering reversing her previous opposition to the Clean Power Plan.

"What's to review? The regulation didn't change from when it went final," he said. "So if she's changing her mind, that's welcome. If she's not, she should just say what she has said in the past that she doesn't support the Clean Power Plan."

Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks, said Stefanik should follow the model of former U.S. Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-Utica, who in the mid-1990s put together a coalition of Republican House members to vote with Democrats on environmental issues.

"They were very effective," Bauer said. "If there are any, we need the Teddy Roosevelt Republicans to stand up today."

Stefanik on Wednesday was one of seven House Republicans who voted against legislation that would prohibit the EPA from finalizing any rule unless the scientific evidence used as the basis was specifically identified and made available for public review.

Stefanik said the legislation threatens the privacy of individuals who participate in scientific studies and could increase the cost of the EPA review process. "This bill could negatively impact the EPA's efforts to make scientifically informed policy decisions," Stefanik said on her congressional office Facebook page.

The legislation, HR 1430, passed by a 228-194 vote, with three Democrats voting "Yes" and seven Republicans voting "No."