

Our View: Obama's bureaucratic cooling isn't best solution

By Lee Rozen, for the editorial board | Posted: Thursday, August 6, 2015 12:00 am

President Barack Obama is creating some bad regulations to do a good thing.

Our coal- and oil-based systems for generating energy in this country for electricity and transportation spew tons of carbon into the air each hour. The carbon combines with gases in the atmosphere to heat up the planet and acidify the oceans, among other things.

Most scientists who have researched it say reducing the carbon the U.S. and other countries put into the air will be essential to slowing global warming.

So, Obama has decided to cut those emissions. That's good, but the way he is doing it isn't.

It may be the best he can do given the intransigent Republican Congress, which refuses to consider effective ways to improve the environment.

But Obama's plan is all about regulations, rules, policy-making boards, state-by-state definitions of what pollution is and isn't. And that will take a whole new bureaucracy with lawyers, managers, consultants, publicists and people who actually do the work. It will invite unending pleading of special cases, exemptions, hardships and delays.

Ah, but that's the American Way, is it not? Well, it sure doesn't seem like it has to be.

Just as American is a belief in the "market." That is, if given the chance, people will vote with their pocketbooks and wallets.

One proposal that has a lot of backers on the Palouse right now - and a few in Congress - is the Citizens Climate Lobby's carbon fee and dividend proposal.

Its argument is simple. Put a fee on the carbon unearthed at every coal mine, oil well and natural gas well in the country. Increase that fee every year. Then, send a dividend of an equal portion of the total fees collected right back to every household.

Everything made from fossil fuels - from gasoline to bunker oil to plastics - would get more expensive. Households could decide to spend their dividends on higher-priced gasoline or a more fuel-efficient car or solar panels on the roof. If, as seems likely, more people stopped buying fossil fuel products as they got more expensive, less carbon would be unleashed on the environment.

All would be done without extensive new bureaucracies and interminable wrangling.

What's not to like about that?