



U.S. regulators use a measure called the social cost of carbon to put a price tag on the damage caused by emitters, such as this power plant in Washington state.

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Congressional watchdog agency to study social cost of carbon

By [Arianna Skibell](#), [E&E News](#) Dec. 21, 2017 , 2:45 PM

Originally published by [E&E News](#)

An independent government watchdog has agreed to examine how the Trump administration uses the social cost of carbon, the metric used to calculate the impact of greenhouse gas emissions.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) led a group earlier this month of seven Democratic senators asking the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine states' and other countries' use of the social cost of carbon, a calculation being used to repeal President Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan.

GAO said it would begin its review in the coming months.

While most economists price around \$40 for every ton of heat-trapping gas emitted, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt lowered the number to \$1 per ton, a number Democrats worry could be used to undermine a slew of environmental regulations.

In the [letter](#), Whitehouse and his fellow Democratic senators also asked GAO to look at what reasoning has been used to support various discount rates and the extent to which each is based on evolving factors such as interest rates and economic growth rates ([E&E News PM](#), 5 December).

The letter was also signed by Sens. Michael Bennet (D-CO), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Kamala Harris (D-CA) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA).

President Donald Trump earlier this year disbanded an interagency working group charged with calculating the metric, and Republican lawmakers have tried to follow suit.

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Republicans urged EPA officials who are looking at repealing rules to examine ones that rely on either the social cost of carbon or co-benefits to justify the cost burdens on the economy.

Still, new research suggests even the higher cost calculated by the Obama administration could be too low. A study out of the University of California suggested that properly accounting for the impacts on agriculture could substantially raise estimates of how much global warming will cost the world in damages ([Climatewire](#), 22 November).

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