

WTE column of August 15, 2015. Editor's headline: "Wyo. lawsuits a bad habit"

CST of same date: "Knee-jerk lawsuits smack of habit, conformity"

Last time I checked, Wyoming's Attorney General had 17 lawsuits on file against the Environmental Protection Agency. Seventeen! And the EPA is just one of several federal agencies thus targeted. What's our governor thinking? Surely he understands, a lawsuit cannot offer long-term solutions for our state's problems, economic or environmental. His legal wrangling merely kicks the can down the road for someone else to pick up.

Sad to say, Wyoming's EPA lawsuits are about to multiply further.

Earlier this month, President Obama unveiled his tough new environmental regulations, charging the EPA with enforcing his Clean Power Plan. The intent is to slow atmospheric chaos by cutting greenhouse-gas emissions from the nation's power plants. Ultimately and inevitably, the CPP will transform America's electricity industry.

The rules are final versions of proposed regulations the EPA announced in 2012 and 2014. They portend policy changes so sweeping, it could shut down hundreds of coal-fired power plants, freeze coal plants that are on the drawing board, and create a boom in the production of renewables.

The strategy had its beginning in historic meetings that culminated November 11, 2014, when, in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, President Obama and President Xi Jinping of China agreed on limiting their respective countries' greenhouse gases

Since then the fight against human-induced atmospheric chaos, which fuels global warming, has become central to Mr. Obama's legacy. "Climate change is not a problem for another generation," he said in a video posted on Facebook. He called the new rules "the biggest, most important step we've ever taken to combat climate change."

The most aggressive of these regulations increases the 30-percent target proposed in the draft, requiring the nation's existing power plants by 2030 to have cut emissions 32 percent from 2005 levels.

The rule also demands that power plants use more renewables like wind and solar power. While the proposed rule would have allowed states to lower emissions by transitioning from plants fired by coal to plants fired by natural gas, the final rule is intended to push electric utilities to invest more quickly in renewables, raising to 28 percent from 22 percent the share of generating capacity that would come from such sources.

The rule retains the same basic structure as the draft proposal, assigning each state a target for reducing carbon pollution from power plants, but allowing states to create their own custom plans. States must submit an initial version of their plans by 2016 and final versions by 2018.

Taken as a whole, the CPP signals President Obama's uncompromising position on the issue.

Wyoming, that pseudo-equality state, early on declared its hatred for our first-ever president of color, stymying his every effort with legal obstructionism. It has not wavered from that position through two presidential terms. Why is this so?

Peter Whybrow may offer some answers. He writes on human neurological makeup, its influence on the marketplace, and the fairness and trust any system requires to function for society's benefit.

Our material progress has had unintended consequences, he writes. As we focus on consumption, we neglect self-knowledge and encourage the brain toward addictive behavior. "One lesson is certain, we are short-term opportunists," he concludes. To attain "The Well-Tuned Brain" of his latest title, we must rethink our choices.

Habit is conformity, and Wyoming's knee-jerk lawsuits certainly smack of habit and conformity. Once a cultural mindset has become pervasive—the idea that "self-interest, economic growth, and the consumer society are good for America," or the focus on profit as "prize" even as sustainable habitat is neglected—"we learn to be thoughtless," he quotes Joshua Epstein writing in "Computational Economics."

"America together with the other rich English-speaking nations has been the stalking horse" not only of a growing health crisis, but also of "a new behavioral maxim: the better human society becomes at providing instant gratification, the less capable each individual citizen becomes at self-regulation."

The author expends considerable effort to explain the health crisis, first with the 2012 obesity statistics published in the "Journal of the American Medical Association." Some 78 million Americans—one in three adults—are obese. Obesity, however, is "merely the most visible of a cascade of health consequences that flow from the stress-inducing, demand-driven, and time-urgent environment we have created."

The Americans most affected by chronic work stress, which often entails danger-laden lack of sleep, "toil long hours, with marginal financial security, often to the neglect of their families and their own health." Wages in constant dollars have declined. Social inequality—another index of stress and insecurity—is growing, "with the middle-class group being left behind."

As for citizens who have turned less capable of exercising restraint and self-regulation, perhaps the aggregate includes our lawsuit-obsessed governor.