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OPINIONLETTERS

The Flawed EPA Theory That Won't Go Away

The claim that particulate matter kills, parroted by the Lancet, was never credible.

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The smokestacks at a coal power plant near Emmett, Kan., Sept. 18, 2021.

PHOTO: CHARLIE RIEDEL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Lancet response (Letters, Nov. 12) to Bjorn Lomborg's op-ed (Nov. 5) states, "A zero-carbon future brings many health benefits. Our conservative estimates suggest 1.2 million deaths annually could be prevented with no exposure to fossil-fuel-derived small-particulate-matter air pollution." I conservatively call that claim false.

"Small-particulate-matter air pollution" wasn't thought to kill anyone until the Clinton Environmental Protection Agency and the researchers it funds started claiming it did in the 1990s to advance the EPA's regulatory agenda. I first criticized the claim on these pages 25 years ago. Although a more thorough debunking is beyond the scope of this letter, panels of outside and independent science advisers to the Clinton- and Trump-era EPAs criticized the claim as without scientific evidence in 1996 and 2019, respectively.

When the Biden administration came to town, though, the Trump-era advisory panel was unceremoniously fired, by email, so that the Biden EPA could establish a new panel of advisers more friendly to its policy agenda. That panel is now the subject of litigation because it has been stacked with researchers beholden to the EPA for tens of millions of dollars in grants.

The EPA's claim that particulate matter kills, parroted by the Lancet, was never credible. Rigging the peer review hasn't helped.

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