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EarthBeat



Demonstrators march across the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City Sept. 20, 2024, to call for an end to the era of fossil fuels (OSV News/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters)

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President-elect Donald Trump Jan. 7 reiterated his call for some companies that make investments in the U.S. economy to bypass some environmental regulations.

That proposal is one of several Catholic policy experts who spoke with OSV News expressed concern about when it comes to how the second Trump administration may approach environmental policy.

Bill O'Keefe, executive vice president for Mission, Mobilization and Advocacy at Catholic Relief Services, the international relief and development agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S., told OSV News, "We're going to be watching very closely, both looking for ways to to partner with the new administration," as well as pushing them on key environmental goals, "and we invite Catholics to join us."

In comments at a wide-ranging news conference at his Mar-a-Lago property in Florida Jan. 7, Trump reiterated his previous pledge to roll back some environmental regulations for individuals or companies willing to spend at least one billion dollars in the U.S. economy.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to conduct environmental reviews before certain energy or infrastructure projects. Those regulations have been criticized by some corporate lobbyists as burdensome, while environmental activists have raised concern the proposal would in effect allow companies to bribe the government to release pollutants.

At the news conference — during which he also declined to rule out the use of military or economic coercion to force Panama to give up control of the Panama Canal or to force Denmark to sell Greenland to the U.S. — Trump criticized the environmental review process, arguing "much of it is just done to stop progress."

"If you invest over a billion dollars in the United States, we're going to give expedited reviews to everybody, because everyone's afraid they're going to come in and get caught in the quagmire, which is very prevalent in the United States —

unfortunately — the quagmire of environmental and various other regulations and rules," Trump said.

In his remarks, Trump also took aim at a Biden administration ban on most offshore drilling, saying he planned to instead "drill, baby, drill."

O'Keefe said in its work on climate policy, CRS has worked with Republican and Democratic administrations all along and will "continue to do so."

He pointed to Trump's stated position that he will exit the 2015 Paris Agreement — a legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by 196 parties — as "regrettable."

"When the United States takes a leadership role in these multilateral forums, they're much more effective," O'Keefe said. "And frankly, they tend to benefit the United States more if we're actually sitting at the table."

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Dan Misleh, founder and executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, a group that seeks to foster understanding of the church's position on environmental questions, told OSV News that he is concerned about an expansion to the use of "fossil fuels in the United States to support our energy appetite."

"Scientists have proven without a doubt that the burning of fossil fuels is warming the planet, and we need to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels as quickly as possible," he said. "But, you know, the president doesn't seem to agree with that analysis."

Misleh argued efforts to foster renewable energy sources could also lead to job creation and economic growth.

Asked about Trump's proposal to curb the environmental review process, Misleh argued, "We can't continue to pollute the air and water and land as we have in the past."

"Certainly there are probably environmental regulations that go too far, but many of them are put in place precisely because there's been harm created by ignoring environmental impacts of the way we live in this country," he said.

Anna Johnson, the North America senior programs manager for the Laudato Si Movement, stressed that care for creation is an important "tenant of our faith."

"The Catholic Church and Catholics are an incredibly important voice in this space, and through being Catholic, we understand that this call to care for our common home is deeply a faith-filled one, and so we shouldn't be divided on this through political boundaries," she said.

Citing California wildfires that were in progress at the time of the interview, Johnson said, "We know that the urgency of addressing the climate crisis transcends political boundaries and demands of us a moral, thoughtful, purposeful response that's based in science and reality, as well as listening to those who are most directly impacted, as is called for by our Gospels."

Asked about areas of opportunity for collaboration, O'Keefe said, "There are definitely opportunities, I think, to connect their sort of economic growth focus with groups like CRS that are looking at inclusive growth," citing U.S. projects in the developing world.

Combining environmental goals with renewable energy efforts that help the poor and vulnerable, he said, could both aid the environment and economic development.

"Pope Francis has made clear the connection between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor," O'Keefe said.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.