

US bishops to EPA: protect 'least of these' in power-plant carbon rules

Brian Roewe | May. 29, 2014 Eco Catholic

Ahead of Monday's expected carbon rules for existing power plants, the U.S. bishops are urging the federal government to protect "the least of these" in its efforts to address climate change, both locally and globally.

Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, [in a](#) [1] [letter](#) [2] Thursday to EPA administrator Gina McCarthy, said the U.S. bishops' conference recognized the importance of taking steps to reduce carbon pollution and mitigate climate change.

"We believe that wise action to address climate change is required *now* to protect the common good for present and future generations," wrote the chair of the conference's domestic justice and human development committee.

Wenski specifically referenced the [proposed standards](#) [3] expected to be announced Monday aimed toward slashing carbon emissions produced by existing coal- and gas-fired power plants. In September, EPA [proposed carbon regulations](#) [4] for new power plants, a first step toward implementing President Barack Obama's [three-part plan](#) [5] for addressing climate change through executive actions.

[According to *The New York Times*](#) [6], the latest cuts could approach 20 percent, and possibly lead to the creation of state cap-and-trade programs. The rules would raise climate change to a "top tier issue" for the remainder of Obama's presidential term, [Bloomberg.com reported](#) [7].

"These standards should protect the health and welfare of all people, especially children, the elderly, as well as poor and vulnerable communities, from harmful pollution emitted from power plants and from the impacts of climate change," Wenski wrote.

Saying the bishops speak not as climate experts but as "pastors of a faith tradition that teaches" creation as a gift from God requiring attentive care, Wenski quoted Pope Francis' recent call for people to be "custodians of creation, not masters of creation."

"Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude," Francis said May 21 [during his general audience](#) [8], adding that "if we destroy creation, creation will destroy us!"

In his letter, Wenski noted that power plants -- a major producer of carbon pollution and contributor to climate change in the U.S. -- often neighbor "low-income neighborhoods and communities of color," and also contribute to respiratory problems, particularly for the young and the elderly.

“Efforts to address climate change must take into account creation and its relationship to the least of these,” he said, quoting Matthew 25.

The archbishop continued: “Too frequently we observe the damaging impacts from climate-related events in the United States and across the globe, particularly on poor and vulnerable communities. Beyond the regulations, the United States should exercise leadership for a globally negotiated climate change agreement.”

As the EPA takes steps toward addressing climate change, Wenski asked the administration consider principles of Catholic social teaching, such as respect for human life and dignity, prudence on behalf of the common good, and giving priority for the poor and vulnerable.

“The consequences of climate change will be borne by the world’s most vulnerable people; inaction will worsen their suffering,” he said. He also called for their voices to be included in shaping the standards.

“We appreciate your commitment to address this urgent global challenge confronting the human family,” Wenski wrote. “The USCCB stands ready to work with you, the Administration, and members of Congress to ensure that measures necessary to address climate change both care for creation and protect the least of these.”

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- [7] <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-05-14/obama-said-to-put-personal-push-behind-epa-emission-rules.html>
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