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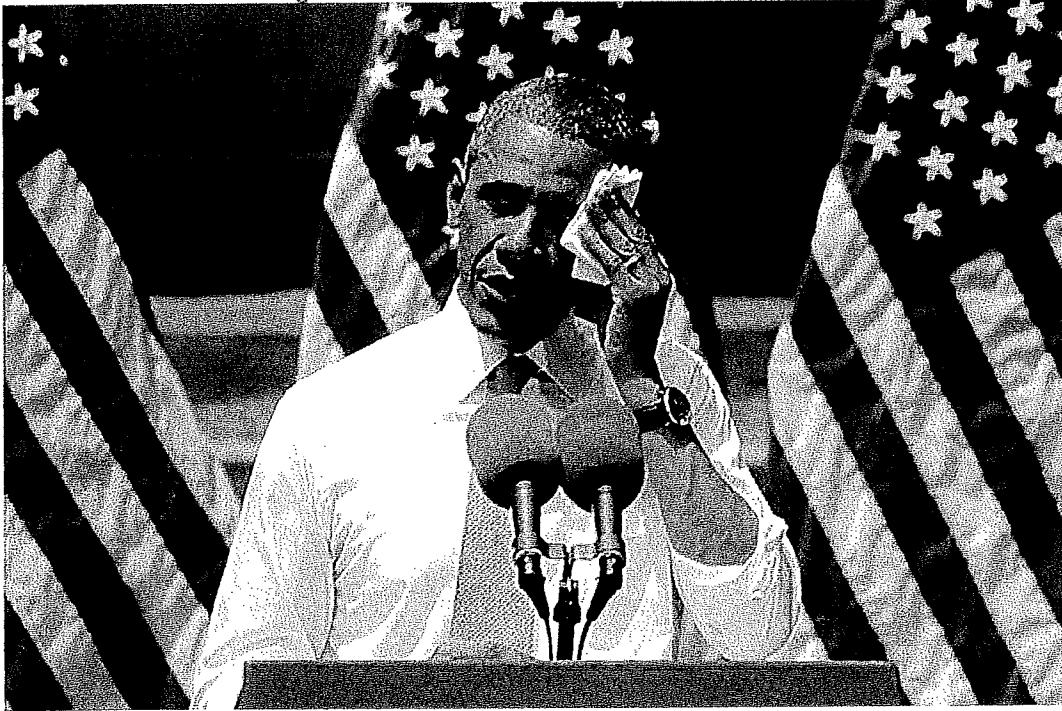
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Illinois coal industry concerned about Obama's call to tighten emission standards

By WILL BUSS

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FILE - This June 25, 2013 file photo shows President Barack Obama wiping perspiration from his face as he speaks about climate change at Georgetown University in Washington. The Obama administration is poised to unveil first-ever rules limiting greenhouse gas emissions from the power plants that dot the U.S. map. President Barack Obama says the rules are essential to curb climate change, but critics disagree.

CHARLES DHARAPAK, FILE — AP Photo

Southern Illinois' coal-powered plants will be closely watching President Obama on Monday when he proposes slashing carbon emission standards for existing plants.

The anticipated Environmental Protection Agency regulation is expected to implement a reduction in carbon pollution from that nation's 600 coal-fired power plants, including in Lively Grove and Baldwin, Ill.

The president has argued that these cuts are necessary to fight global warming and is expected to call on each state to decide its own greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. Opponents say this move will only force plants to close.

In Randolph County, Houston-based Dynegy Inc. has operated the Baldwin Energy Complex about a mile north of Baldwin since 1970. The company has invested in "clean coal" technology during the past decade.

The company has 10 power plants across the state, of which nine are powered by coal.

Dynergy Public Relations Director Katy Sullivan said the president's anticipated plan would hurt the company. She said Illinois already has strict standards and a national program would be a better idea.

"We certainly believe it will affect our business," Sullivan said. "We're constantly building technology to reduce emissions to reduce costs with minimum impact on the environment.

"We're certainly think a comprehensive national program is better than a state-level program because if you look at Illinois, with a multi-pollutant standard, Dynergy and other companies have made significant investments. They are much more stronger standards than neighboring states have."

The Prairie State Generating Co. has been generating power in Washington County from coal from an adjacent mine since 2011. St. Louis-based Peabody Energy owns a 5 percent stake in the 1,800-megawatt power plant.

External affairs manager Alyssa Harre said the company wanted to defer comment until after the president's announcement.

"We do not yet have a statement on the proposed upcoming regulations, as we are waiting for them to first be released," Harre said.

Illinois Coal Association President Phillip Gonet said existing plants do not have the technology to meet the anticipated standards. Except for the Prairie State Generation Co. and one other plant, there has not been a new power plant built in the state in 25 years. He said 60 percent of the state's power plants have been around for at least 40 years.

"I can't speak for those entities, but I think Prairie State might have a little easier time than Dynergy only because it is a new plant with newer technology," Gonet said. "But I think both would have challenges. My guess would be that Baldwin would have a more difficult time than Prairie State, but both plants could be jeopardized. We think all coal power plants in Illinois could be jeopardized."

Gonet said the technology is not there to make these reductions possible.

"The EPA continues its charade that the technology actually exists to reduce carbon emissions today and is proven successful," he said. "It is not."

Gonet also said that Obama should not be making this call and is superseding his authority. He expects the coal industry to challenge this move in court.

"The Obama administration is taking that out of the hands of Congress," he said. "The administration is making the law, which is wrong."

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