

A certain amount of policy inconsistency is inevitable in any Administration. But the Trump Administration seems to be breaking all records. The Administration does have strong impulses. The trouble is that its goals keep colliding. Here are some examples.

Favoring gas at the expense of coal. . . And vice versa. Trump wants to promote fracking. But doing so increases the supply of natural gas and reduces the price, making coal-fired power plants less competitive. Meanwhile, Trump is desperately trying to find ways to keep coal-fired power plants from closing. But doing so squeezes demand for natural gas. Export facilities are limited, so what are gas producers supposed to do with the extra gas that Trump wants them to produce? The more he intervenes on one side, the more he undermines his efforts on the other side.

Deregulating while picking winners. The Administration says it's *against* regulation and *for free* markets. But it has already proposed one massive regulatory intervention to protect coal and nuclear plants, which FERC is rejected. And it is presently poised to renew its effort, under the guise of national security. Basically, it wants to re-regulate the electricity markets that FERC has successfully deregulated.

Cutting taxes ... and raising them. Trump pushed hard for legislation cutting federal taxes. He's outspoken about the evils of high taxes. But he has already raised tariffs on billions of dollars of goods - including tariffs on solar panels. Tariffs are taxes - in fact, until the early Twentieth Century, they were the main source of government revenue. Like sales taxes, they are largely passed on to customers.

Stopping imports while encouraging them. Trump is upset about imports from Canada. But don't forget his approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which would allow massive amounts of oil to enter the US from Canada. That oil will, of course, compete with US oil either here or in export markets.

Defending states rights ... And also infringing them. One of Pruitt's main goals was said to be returning environmental regulation to the states. But he has sent to the White House a proposal to block California climate change regulations for cars and trucks.

Rejecting *Chevron* . . . while relying on judicial deference. Many proposed deregulatory actions are purportedly justified by altered agency interpretations of statutes. To prevail, the Administration needs courts to defer to its interpretations, and it has accordingly cited the *Chevron* doctrine in court. Yet *Chevron* is reviled by legal conservatives like the Federalist Society protégés who Trump likes to nominate as judges.

I suppose we should be happy that Trump is undermining his own effectiveness. But I'm not sure he sees it that way. As long as his actions appeal to the base, maybe he doesn't care all that much what they actually achieve.