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OP-ED OPINION

# Maryland's regulation SWAT team

By BY RENA STEINZOR  
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Gov. Larry Hogan has taken a well-worn page from the right-wing handbook and announced the appointment of a [panel of business executives](#) to identify state regulations that should be dismantled. It's tempting to dismiss the panel as a sop to his conservative base, but it poses a serious threat to the environment and public health. For one thing, the panel's composition is the very definition of bias. If you want to run a better government, why not appoint a panel that includes all points of view? Why not ask this more balanced group not just to consider regulatory cutbacks but also to identify areas where regulation needs to be stronger to save lives and keep Maryland's very lucrative natural resources, including the Chesapeake Bay, clean?

The panel is just the latest in a series of disconcerting signs that the governor has fallen in step with the extreme mantra of certain members of the U.S. House of Representatives, who constantly hold hearings in search of evidence that regulations lose jobs and cost huge and unwarranted amounts of money. Efforts to protect the environment are always in the bullseye during such attacks. The problem, of course, is that a series of careful studies done by reputable economists shows that those rules create as many jobs as are "lost," shifting the location but not

the amount of employment. The reason is that workers are hired to manufacture, install and operate pollution control equipment. Of course, it costs industry money to take those steps, but the money pays for additional jobs, and, after all, it's money spent cleaning up some of the pollution that they impose on the rest of us.

Environmental rules produce tangible benefits. By cleaning up the air and water, they prevent death and serious illness, save health care costs, and cut down the millions of days people would otherwise take off from work and school because they are sick. Elaborate analyses prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency show that these benefits far outweigh industry costs.

To bring the implications of Governor Hogan's blue ribbon, deregulatory SWAT team to life, consider what he's been doing about smog (or ozone) pollution. As soon as he was elected, he took the unprecedented step of suspending a final rule signed by his predecessor. The rule would have required two of the biggest, dirtiest, coal-fired power plants in the state, which are owned by NRG and located in Dickerson and Chalk Point, to operate state-of-the-art smokestack scrubbers, switch to natural gas or shut down. A few days ago, the Maryland Department of the Environment **issued a rewritten proposal** that is now being hustled through public comment and expert review. It puts an imaginary bubble over all the coal plants owned by a single company and allowing them to run full speed unless emissions exceed a 24-hour average. This approach is significantly weaker than the final rule the governor ditched.

Smog exacerbates asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other cardiovascular illnesses, and it causes premature death. According to the American Lung Association some 150,000 children and 435,000 adults suffer from asthma in Maryland — 14,000 children and 47,000 adults in Baltimore City are among that number. Over 600,000 people in our state have COPD and other cardiovascular diseases, and 10 percent live in the city.

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Because of these very serious public health problems, EPA is scheduled in October to require sharp reductions in the amount of pollutants that cause smog. Why Maryland should take three steps back when it will soon need to take three steps forward is as mysterious as it is ill-advised.

The governor says his deregulatory panel will hunt for additional regulations that might discourage businesses from moving to or staying in Maryland. Yet if he tried — and I suspect he did not — he could not find a single reliable study supporting the notion that a state's regulatory climate has a major influence on where businesses locate. Rather, energy and labor costs are the key motivators. When you consider the economic importance of a clean Chesapeake Bay to the state's financial security, strong environmental protection should be a no-brainer.

As for the bias inherent in the all-business membership of the so-called "Regulatory Reform Commission," either the governor has made the fundamental mistake of thinking that business leaders somehow represent the interests of all Marylanders or he is simply preoccupied with fulfilling campaign promises to wealthy contributors. Neither rationale is reassuring, and a third is painfully obvious: His administration, which should be pursuing the broad public interest, is instead focusing on special interests.

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