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### **A most potent greenhouse gas** **Editorial Board**

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The rise in oil and gas drilling in Ohio and other states has helped trigger a welcome change in power generation, utilities switching to cleaner-burning natural gas. Yet controls on methane emissions from the industry have lagged, creating a barrier to meeting broader goals to address climate change. Compared to carbon dioxide, methane is more than 80 times more potent as a greenhouse gas.

Last year, the Obama White House focused on the oil and gas sector, a key move given that it is the country's largest industrial source of methane emissions. In August, new rules were proposed to capture emissions from hydraulically fractured wells, to check well pads and compressors for leaks and to apply control technologies to transmission facilities. As important as those measures would be, they would apply only to new or substantially modified sources.

On Thursday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency took a more comprehensive approach, announcing plans to extend methane regulations to existing wells. Although time is running short and the industry is opposed, the push toward full regulation is necessary to meet worthy environmental objectives.

A study by ICF International in 2014 pointed to severe problems with leaving existing facilities unregulated. The consulting firm projected that emissions from sites operating in 2011 (which would not be subject to the EPA rules for new facilities) would represent 90 percent of methane emissions from the industry by 2018.

Rules affecting only new wells would reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector the equivalent of 28 million metric tons of carbon dioxide a year by 2025. Yet the White House goal of reducing emissions 40 percent to 45 percent below 2012 levels requires an additional reduction the equivalent of 75 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

Oil and gas interests prefer voluntary compliance, but such an approach would not deliver the reductions needed to meet commitments made by Washington in the climate accord reached in Paris last year. The Clean Air Task Force estimates a mere 1 percent participation in a current voluntary program.

Although the time remaining for action is limited, that methane is such a potent greenhouse gas demands the effort be made. The large gap in meeting methane reduction targets if regulations apply just to new wells would harm public health (methane contributing to ozone and smog). It would damage the nation's effort in combating climate change and choke off job growth in companies that apply technologies that control emissions.

As the oil and gas industry expands, care must be taken that it does so in a responsible way, sensitive to long-term effects on the climate and human health. That means implementing a comprehensive set of rules, vigorously enforced, to make sure short-term benefits are not outweighed by long-term costs.