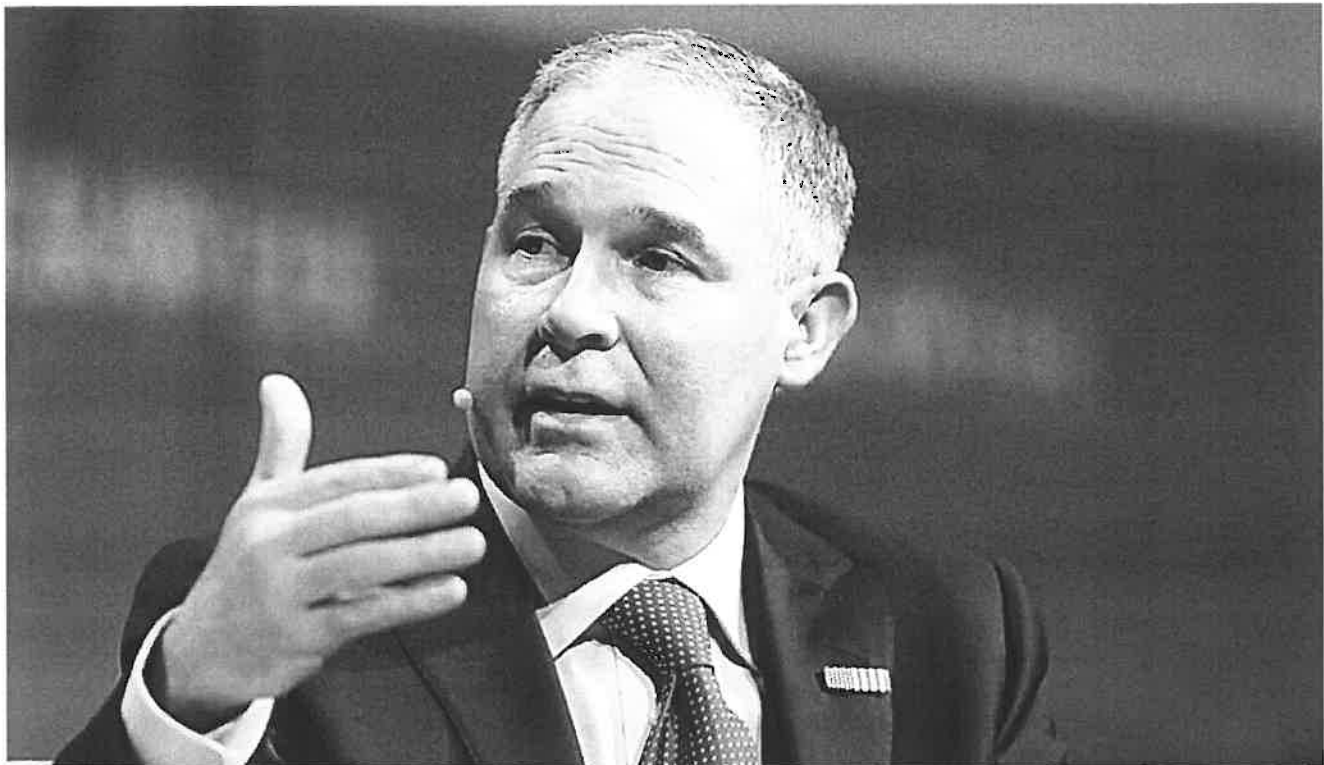


Pruitt starts steering EPA away from climate change, more toward clean water and air



EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said Thursday on CNBC's "Squawk Box" program that he does not believe that carbon dioxide is a primary contributor to global warming. (Associated Press) more >

By Ben Wolfgang - *The Washington Times* - Thursday, March 9, 2017

Scott Pruitt on Thursday made clear he doesn't believe carbon dioxide is the main driver of climate change — and his declaration touched off a firestorm among critics who interpret the remark as concrete proof that the EPA administrator plans to disregard the past eight years and take the agency in a new direction.

Mr. Pruitt offered the comments during a morning interview with CNBC as President Trump was preparing to sign an executive order reversing key government regulations on carbon pollution.

The EPA chief told CNBC that it's challenging to truly measure humans' effect on the climate and that there is "tremendous disagreement" about exactly how much carbon pollution contributes to climate change.

"I would not agree that [carbon] is a primary contributor to the global warming that we see," Mr. Pruitt said.

His remarks put him on the opposite side from most climate scientists, researchers and governments, and underscore a sharp break from the EPA's approach over the past eight years.

During the Obama administration, the Environmental Protection Agency was the tip of the spear in a governmentwide fight against climate change. The agency crafted rules such as the Clean Power Plan, the nation's first set of limits on carbon emissions from power plants.

That rule, which remains tied up in federal court, now is on the chopping block. Mr. Trump is expected to soon direct the EPA to begin the lengthy, complex process of unwinding the plan.

President Obama saw the EPA as a necessary tool in his climate change agenda, but Mr. Trump and Mr. Pruitt believe the agency should have a more narrow purpose: protecting the nation's air and water, not trying to stem global temperature rises.

In fact, Mr. Pruitt built his political career challenging the EPA's carbon rules in federal court while he served as attorney general of Oklahoma.

"The president has made it very clear that the administration is going to refocus EPA on clean air and clean water. Administrator Pruitt is and has been right in line with that approach," said Michael McKenna, a Republican strategist and president of the lobbying firm MWR Strategies who worked on the Trump transition team.

For environmentalists and Democrats in Congress who already fear what the administration has in store for climate policy, Mr. Pruitt's remarks went too far.

"There are only two explanations for Mr. Pruitt's outrageous comment: Either our nation's chief environmental officer is unaware of basic scientific facts, or he is intent upon misleading the public," said Sen. Thomas R. Carper of Delaware, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "Carbon dioxide is one of the most potent and abundant greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, and it is the primary greenhouse gas emitted by human activities. Those are the facts; they are not up for debate. Mr. Pruitt and I can have differences of opinion, and we certainly do, but Mr. Pruitt is not entitled to his own facts."

Democrats quickly began fundraising off of the issue. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California used the comments to ask for money Thursday afternoon on behalf of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

"President Trump appointed a climate change denier to lead the EPA — and now we're seeing the effects. Grassroots Democrats can't let these horrifying claims go unnoticed. Will you fight back?" she said in the message.

Michael Brune, executive director of the environmental group the Sierra Club, said the Senate should demand that Mr. Pruitt be removed from his post.

"The arsonist is now in charge of the fire department, and he seems happy to let the climate crisis burn out of control," Mr. Brune said in a statement. "Pruitt is endangering our families, and any sensible senator should demand he is removed from his position immediately for misleading Congress and being unfit and unwilling to do the job he has been entrusted to do."

During his Senate confirmation hearings this year, Mr. Pruitt told lawmakers that he believes climate change is real — a statement that put him at odds with Mr. Trump, who has said global warming is a "hoax."

Much like Energy Secretary Rick Perry and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, both of whom were pressed on the same question by Democratic senators, Mr. Pruitt said climate change is real and that mankind has played a role but the extent of the role is unclear.

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