Message

From: Hassell, Emily [hassell.emily@epa.gov]
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To: AO OPA OMR CLIPS [AO_OPA_OMR_CLIPS@epa.gov]
Subject: News Clips - 3 April 2018

(Full stories, highlights, and details are listed further down in the email, and can be jumped to by clicking on any of the links below.)

Fuel Economy Standards

CBS News - Scott Pruitt says emissions standards for cars, light trucks should be revised

E&E Climatewire - Pruitt did it. Here's why he's loosening the car rules

Washington Times - EPA chief Scott Pruitt scraps Obama-era fuel efficiency rules

Politico - EPA will revise Obama-era auto standards

CNN - EPA wants to give automakers a break on fuel economy rules. But that might not help

ABC News - EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announces rollback of Obama-era auto fuel efficiency, emissions standards

Washington Post - EPA to roll back car emissions standards, handing automakers a big win

AP - EPA to Roll Back Auto Emissions Standards

AP - EPA to ease back emissions standards

Reuters - EPA to relax fuel efficiency standards for autos

NPR - EPA Moves To Weaken Landmark Fuel Efficiency Rules

Bloomberg - U.S. Carmakers May Regret What They Wished For on Pollution Rules

CBS News - EPA's auto emissions decision sparks a fierce battle

ABC News - Trump EPA moving to relax Obama-era auto fuel efficiency, emissions standards

Los Angeles Times - Don't let Trump and Pruitt Make America Smoggy Again

California Waiver

Fox News - EPA, Pruitt announce rollback of Obama-era fuel standards, setting up another battle with California

The Hill - Calif. to fight Trump's 'politically motivated' car standards plan

Politico - California ready to sue if Pruitt goes after car waiver

USA Today - On mpg standards, let California be California (*Editorial)

Administrator Pruitt Coverage

Daily Caller - EPA's Scott Pruitt Is Getting Crushed Under The Weight Of Negative Press Coverage

AP - Trump offers support to embattled EPA head

Politico - Trump and Kelly phone Pruitt as damaging reports pile up

The Hill - Trump backs Pruitt amid ethics controversies

Washington Times - Trump tells EPA chief Pruitt his job is safe

Washington Post - On one hand, Pruitt is a huge ethical headache. On the other, he's doing exactly what Trump wants.

MSNBC - Amid scandal, the EPA's Pruitt has a chat with the White House

Daily Caller - CNN Salivates At Scott Pruitt's Potential Demise

Politico - White House considered firing Pruitt

The Hill - GOP rep calls for Pruitt to step down or be fired

CNN - Pruitt tension leads to Cabinet shuffle déjà vu

The Atlantic - Scott Pruitt Bypassed the White House to Give Big Raises to Favorite Aides

Washington Post - Top Pruitt aide at EPA also shopped for housing on his behalf

Washington Post - EPA explored private jet lease for Pruitt's travels last year

CBS News - White House reportedly reviewing Scott Pruitt's condo rental tied to energy lobbyist

Wall Street Journal - White House Probes EPA Chief Pruitt Over His Links to Lobbyist

ABC News - EPA Chief Scott Pruitt facing more calls to investigate housing arrangement

Politico - Democrats question Pruitt on housing arrangement

Politico - Democrats call for watchdog investigation of Pruitt housing

New York Times - Pruitt Had a $50-a-Day Condo Linked to Lobbyists. Their Client's Project Got Approved.

ABC News - White House, Dems seek EPA answers on Pruitt's rental deal

Washington Post - A swamp monster is running the EPA (*Editorial)

General

Reuters - Exclusive: EPA gives giant refiner a 'hardship' waiver from regulation

BNA - EPA Aims for Predictable Chemical Reviews, Director Says

E&E Greenwire - Acting deputy leaves today

Daily Caller - Enviros Sue Trump's EPA For Relaxing Pollution Rule Targeting Power Plants

BNA - Judge Stingy With EPA on Plea for More Time on Late Air Limits

Connecticut Post - Ansonia fined for hazardous waste

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CBS News
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/scott-pruitt-says-emissions-standards-for-cars-light-trucks-should-be-revised/
Scott Pruitt says emissions standards for cars, light trucks should be revised
By Jacqueline Alemany, 4/2/18, 11:39 PM

The Trump administration announced its intent to roll back signature Obama-era greenhouse gas and fuel emissions standards for cars and light trucks on Monday, according to a press release.

Scott Pruitt, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, said in a statement that the EPA was still working to determine "appropriate standards" but called the emissions determination made by President Obama's EPA "wrong."

"Obama's EPA cut the midterm evaluation process short with politically charged expediency, made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality and set the standards too high," Pruitt wrote in a statement.

The state of California is already expecting to fight to continue to set its own ambitious and more stringent emissions standards for cars to reduce emissions and pollution, an authority granted by a waiver under the 1970 Clean Air Act. Mr. Pruitt said in the statement that California's waiver is being "reexamined."

"EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford – while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars," Mr Pruitt wrote. "It's in everyone's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to working with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

Mr. Trump has long teased Mr. Pruitt's plans to roll back Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards (CAFE), a move expected to be welcomed by automakers.

E&E Climatewire
https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/stories/1060077987/search?keyword=EPA
Pruitt did it. Here's why he's loosening the car rules
By Camille von Kaenel, 4/3/18

U.S. EPA cast aside a 1,217-page staff analysis to cite automaker arguments in its official declaration to loosen fuel economy rules.

The agency pointed to industry concerns about motorist safety, technology lapses and the unpopularity of cleaner cars in its justification for rolling back Obama-era standards meant to make passenger vehicles go 54 miles on a gallon of gas by 2025. (Real-world estimates put that number at 36 mpg.)

Those arguments, which echo the concerns of the auto industry and its allies, were often challenged for being inaccurate by agency specialists under the past administration and by environmentalists.

The 38-page document released yesterday sharply contrasts to a yearslong technical analysis by EPA staff released two years ago. It found that car companies had the technology to meet the rules for model years 2022 to 2025 (Climatewire, July 19, 2016).

"It reflects the ignorance of this administration with regards to science and the degree it will go to reject the skills of its own high-quality employees," said Jim McCargar, a former senior policy adviser on EPA's car program. "It's just flat-out wrong."

The agency's paperwork yesterday marks the start of a new rulemaking process that's expected to take months. Officials with EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which shares regulatory oversight on fuel economy, will hammer out a detailed proposal for cars made between 2022 and 2025.

Those talks, along with negotiations involving California, will determine the course of the most significant effort to tackle greenhouse gas emissions from mobile sources. Vehicles overtook power plants as the nation's largest contributor of carbon dioxide emissions last year.

Under Administrator Scott Pruitt, EPA has sought to undo federal rules limiting emissions related to climate change. The corporate average fuel economy, or CAFE, standards were seen as a major step to address climbing temperatures under former President Obama. Now they're considered financially onerous.

"Based on our review and analysis of the comments and information submitted, and EPA's own analysis, the Administrator believes that the current [greenhouse gas] emission standards for [model years] 2022-2025 light-duty vehicles presents challenges for auto manufacturers due to feasibility and practicability, raises potential concerns related to automobile safety, and results in significant additional costs on consumers, especially low-income consumers," says the EPA document released yesterday.

The notice builds the case for rolling back the climate program, but it provides few new details or analysis. The language went through several contested drafts before being published on the agency's website late yesterday. It refers to studies funded by automakers, estimates from companies and reports that have been questioned by most researchers.

"Rather than pointing to the fact that these standards are cost-effective for consumers, that we have the technology to meet and exceed these standards by 2025, and that these standards have tremendous positive impacts on the economy, the ideologues currently at the EPA have decided to ignore this evidence and misconstrue how the standards work," Dave Cooke, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, wrote in a blog post yesterday.

Unpopular plug-ins

The document relies heavily on arguments provided by automakers — primarily the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, the powerful trade lobby pressing for a reconsideration of the rules.

It makes broad claims that changes in market conditions, like long-lasting low gas prices, and consumers' growing preference for trucks and SUVs justify a change in the rules. To gather more data, EPA promised to "explore new analytical tools to look at new vehicle sales and fleet turnover as part of its decision-making record for the new rule."

The document also cites safety concerns from smaller cars. That's significant because it offers an opening to NHTSA, the Transportation Department agency tasked with extending mileage and saving lives, to lower the targets.

Americans' tepid embrace of electric vehicles also played a role in the decision.

EPA cites estimates provided by Toyota Motor Corp., Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV and Mercedes-Benz arguing that carmakers would need to sell significantly more electric vehicles than originally estimated by the program to meet the 2025 targets. The standards are averaged across the fleet. Mercedes-Benz, a laggard on the rules, suggested a quarter of its sales would need to be electric vehicles to meet the Obama-era goals.

The document includes a figure from the Association of Global Automakers showing that sales of electrified vehicles have gone down since 2013. The document says that "calls into question" Obama-era projections about EVs.

Others have reached different conclusions. Though sales of hybrid vehicles have slowed, according to a dashboard maintained by the alliance, sales of plug-in hybrid, battery electric and fuel-cell vehicles have been going up since 2013, both as a total and as a share.

In the past, EPA expected automakers to meet the rules even if sales of plug-ins remained below 10 percent. That's because the rules are designed to force improvements in internal-combustion engine technology, not mandate sales of a type of vehicle.

At times, the document provides a behind-the-scenes look at how the grievances of individual companies have resonated with the Trump administration. Most automakers have been quiet publicly about the rules.

In one example, the document cites a study by the Center for Automotive Research that estimated the standards could cause the loss of 1.13 million jobs if they increased the price of a car by $6,000. Ford Motor Co.'s then-CEO, Mark Fields, mentioned that number to President Trump directly last January.

But it's a worst-case scenario. Environmental and automotive research groups said the study was not credible. Most estimates, including EPA's, put the cost of the standards at less than $2,000 per vehicle.

Washington Times
https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/apr/2/scott-pruitt-epa-chief-scraps-obama-era-fuel-effic/
EPA chief Scott Pruitt scraps Obama-era fuel efficiency rules
By Ben Wolfgang, 4/2/18

In a move that could upend the U.S. auto industry and spark a bitter legal fight with states such as California, the Trump administration said Monday that it will scrap Obama-era fuel economy standards and effectively cancel the looming requirement that all vehicle fleets average more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt said the program, known as Corporate Average Fuel Economy, or CAFE standards, fell victim to politics during the Obama administration as officials sought to take dramatic action against climate change.

He said his predecessors at the EPA rushed through rules governing fuel economy for model years 2022 through 2025 without fully understanding their potential consequences, and that it’s now clear those rules simply aren’t realistic.

The decision represents a major defeat for green groups and other backers of the program, which was one of the most sweeping and lasting environmental actions of the prior administration.

“The Obama administration’s determination was wrong,” Mr. Pruitt said in a statement. “Obama’s EPA … made assumptions about the standards that didn’t comport with reality, and set the standards too high.”

The announcement also marks a turning point for how the government handles fuel economy for cars and light trucks, and could slow what had been a steady climb toward more efficient vehicles on U.S. roads. Car manufacturers, though, insist that cleaner cars will continue to roll off assembly lines.

The current iteration of the CAFE program began with 2012 models and was the result of intense negotiations between the Obama administration and automakers. Although the benchmarks will remain in effect through 2021, the next phase — in which all automakers would have had to ensure that their vehicles averaged about 54.5 mpg — was seen as the most difficult to achieve.

Supporters said it would result in a dramatic reduction in harmful tailpipe emissions. Critics argued that it was a misguided federal mandate that pushed consumers toward electric cars or other vehicles that they couldn't afford or simply didn't want.

Auto industry groups praised the about-face and vowed to work with Mr. Pruitt to rewrite the standards in a more realistic way. The EPA chief said he intends to immediately begin work on a replacement program, though it's unclear when or if such a plan will materialize.

"Consumer research shows that the monthly payment is the top concern when car shopping. So, to ensure ongoing fuel economy improvement, the wisest course of action is to keep new vehicles affordable so more consumers can replace an older car with a new vehicle that uses much less fuel — and offers more safety features," the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers said in a statement.

Environmentalists, on the other hand, called the move another favor from Mr. Pruitt for the oil industry, which has a vested interest in ensuring American vehicles continue relying on liquid fuels.

"These rollbacks from Scott Pruitt mean Americans will pay more at the pump while our air gets dirtier, just so Pruitt can help the corporate lobbyists and polluters who give him favors and marching orders," said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club.

"Pruitt's decision to side with Ford and the Auto Alliance rather than the overwhelming majority of Americans who want these clean car standards should come as no surprise as this is an administrator who focuses solely on what's best for corporate polluters, not the public. But make no mistake, we will continue fighting back to protect these standards and the health of our communities," he said.

Mr. Pruitt's decision, which he will discuss at length Tuesday during a speech at a Virginia auto dealership, sets up what could be a landmark court battle between the federal government and a coalition of states.

Under current law, California has the authority to establish its own fuel economy standards. Those state standards were aligned with federal thresholds under the Obama-era program, but Monday's move puts the two sets of rules in direct conflict.

California has said it has no plans to change its own standards, and the state wields a great deal of influence over the issue because it accounts for roughly 12 percent of all vehicle sales nationwide.

"The Trump administration's assault on clean car standards risks our ability to protect our children's health, tackle climate change, and save hardworking Americans money," California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a statement Monday.

"My team is currently reviewing the EPA's determination and working closely with the California Air Resources Board. We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the administration's war on our environment. California didn't become the sixth-largest economy in the world by spectating," he said.

The EPA said it is re-examining California's waiver, suggesting it could be poised to try to eliminate the state's legal authority to set its own standards.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country. EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars," Mr. Pruitt said.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/pruitt-california-cant-dictate-car-rules-928969
EPA will revise Obama-era auto standards
By Alex Guillen, 4/2/18, 2:53 PM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt today stopped short of announcing plans to revoke California's waiver to enforce more stringent auto emissions standards, but indicated he will pressure the state to fall in line behind federal rules.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," Pruitt said in a press release formally announcing his decision to revise rules for model year 2022-2025 vehicles.

"EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars," Pruitt continued. "It is in America's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

California regulators have indicated they are unlikely to agree to any changes to the program unless EPA agrees to issue standards continuing to require more efficient vehicles for model years 2026-2030.

Pruitt also took a swipe at the Obama administration, which in its own January 2017 determination said the current rules were achievable.

"The Obama EPA's determination was wrong," Pruitt said. "Obama's EPA cut the midterm evaluation process short with politically charged expediency, made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality and set the standards too high."

CNN
http://money.cnn.com/2018/04/02/news/epa-emissions-rules/index.html
EPA wants to give automakers a break on fuel economy rules. But that might not help
By Chris Isidore, 4/2/18, 4:58 PM

The agency said that the Obama rules are inappropriate and will be revised in a statement on Monday. But about a third of the country operates under tougher emission rules that were established by the state of California, and are currently followed by another 12 other states. And so far the EPA is not seeking to upend those tougher rules. Instead it will try to reach an agreement with California on a single national standard.

As long as a third of the nation operates under the tougher California rules, automakers will have to make cars that comply with the more stringent requirements. So even if the EPA does ease up emissions standards, they'll still be under pressure to make more fuel efficient vehicles, such as plug-ins.

Greenhouse gas emissions are tied directly to how much gasoline a car burns. So any rule requiring lower greenhouse gas emissions requires higher fuel mileage.

The automakers are on record saying they're not sure they can meet the Obama administration's aggressive target to raise corporate average fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon by the year 2025. They also desperately want is a single national standard so they can sell cars that comply with all rules.

The EPA said the waiver granted to California to set a separate, tougher standard is still being reexamined by EPA.

"It is in America's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard," said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.

Officials in California made clear Monday they're not prepared to drop their tougher standards.

"We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment," said California Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

Some advocates of better fuel economy worry that even if the California standards remain in place, the automakers will sell less fuel efficient cars and trucks in the two-thirds of the nation that isn't covered by those rules.

"The may dump dirty cars on two-thirds of the nation," said David Friedman, director of car policy for Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports.

The original rule called for EPA to reevaluate the new, tougher standards part way through the process to see if they were realistic. But just before Obama left office, the EPA determined that the rule should stand as it was originally designed.

"The Obama Administration's determination was wrong," said Pruitt Monday. "Obama's EPA cut the midterm evaluation process short with politically charged expediency, made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality, and set the standards too high."

Pruitt has advocated rolling back a number of environmental rules at the bequest of various industries. He said last year he wanted to review the new emissions rules, so Monday's action had been expected.

The statement Monday didn't provide any specifics about what the new rules will entail.

Critics of Pruitt and the Trump EPA argue that automakers are better off making cars and trucks with better fuel economy.

"Fuel efficiency sells vehicles. Rolling back standards will curb the sale of vehicles," said Jack Gillis, director of public affairs at the Consumer Federation of America.

ABC News
http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/epa-administrator-scott-pruitt-announces-rollback-obama-era/story?id=54202466
EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announces rollback of Obama-era auto fuel efficiency, emissions standards
By Arlette Saenz, 4/3/18, 12:05 PM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announced today that his agency was rolling back Obama-era fuel efficiency and emissions standards for automobiles, calling the move another step in President Trump's "regulatory agenda."

"Those standards are inappropriate and should be revised," Pruitt said at the EPA.

The change in policy relaxes fuel efficiency and emissions standards for vehicles manufactured between 2022 and 2025. Pruitt did not outline any new standards, saying they are still under evaluation.

Current greenhouse gas regulations, which went into effect shortly before President Trump took office, require automakers to roughly double fuel economy to more than 50 miles per gallon. The EPA says that standard would be replaced by one developed in conjunction with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"It is very right for us to be here to recognize that what was done in 2011 and 2012, as we evaluate now, is not appropriate going forward and we're going to get it right," Pruitt said.

The agency also plans to "re-examine" a waiver that allows California to set stricter standards than federally mandated.

The auto industry applauded the rollback, arguing that Obama-era standards would have proved costly. But Democrats were quick to criticize the decision.

"EPA Administrator Pruitt's decision to begin rolling back fuel economy standards is a victory for big oil and major corporations at the expense of American consumers and clean air for our kids," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said. "As usual, the administration sides with big, powerful special interests over the interests of average American families, who will pay the price for lower miles per gallon and dirtier air."

The attorneys general of California and New York have threatened legal action, and the chair of the California Air Resources Board, which determined California's standards, warned the decision will degrade air quality and undermine automakers' "regulatory certainty."

The EPA announcement comes as Pruitt faces a series of ethics questions. The White House has launched a formal inquiry into Pruitt's living situation when he first moved to Washington, D.C., last year. As first reported by ABC News last week, Pruitt rented a single bedroom in a Capitol Hill townhouse partly owned by Vicki Hart, the wife of energy lobbyist J. Steven Hart.

The rental agreement allowed Pruitt to pay $50 a night for use of the condo on the nights he stayed there. According to Bloomberg, he paid more than $6,000.

At the EPA Tuesday, Pruitt ignored reporters' questions about whether he still maintains Trump's confidence. The president spoke with Pruitt by phone Monday night and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly phoned Pruitt this morning, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said.

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox has said the arrangement was not a gift and the lease was "consistent with federal ethics regulations." But Democrats and ethics groups have raised concerns about the agreement. Pruitt has previously come under fire after the EPA spent more than $118,000 on his flights, many of them in first class.

"I don't know how you survive this one," former New Jersey governor and ABC News contributor Chris Christie told ABC News Chief Anchor George Stephanopoulos on "This Week" Sunday.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/epa-to-roll-back-car-emissions-standards/2018/04/02/b720f0b6-36a6-11e8-acd5-35eac230e514_story.html?utm_term=.f73f855e83ae
EPA to roll back car emissions standards, handing automakers a big win
By Juliet Eilperin and Brady Dennis, 4/2/18, 6:34 PM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt announced Monday that he would revoke Obama-era standards requiring cars and light trucks sold in the United States to average more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025, a move that could change the composition of the nation's auto fleet for years.

The push to rewrite the first carbon limits on car s and SUVs, which came out of an agreement among federal officials, automakers and the state of California, is sure to spark major political and legal battles.

California has authority under the Clean Air Act to set its own emissions limits, and it has threatened to sue if its waiver is revoked and it is blocked from imposing stricter targets. Such a fight has broad implications, because 12 other states, representing more than a third of the country's auto market, follow California's standards.

Pruitt's decision reflects the power of the auto industry, which asked him to revisit the Obama administration's review of the model years 2022-2025 fuel-efficiency targets just days after he took office. President Trump told autoworkers in Detroit last year that he was determined to roll back the emissions rules as part of a bigger effort to jump-start the nation's car industry.

"The Obama administration's determination was wrong," Pruitt said in a statement. "Obama's EPA cut the Midterm Evaluation process short with politically charged expediency, made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality, and set the standards too high."

Pruitt did not specify what limits would be put in place, saying the EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration would establish a standard that "allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars." The agency said he is still considering the status of California's waiver.

Officials in that state immediately excoriated the decision.

"This is a politically motivated effort to weaken clean vehicle standards with no documentation, evidence or law to back up that decision," Mary Nichols, head of the California Air Resources Board, said in a statement. She argued that the move would "demolish" the nation's shift toward cleaner cars and that "EPA's action, if implemented, will worsen people's health with degraded air quality and undermine regulatory certainty for automakers."

Nichols also hinted at a potential legal fight to come.

"This decision takes the U.S. auto industry backward, and we will vigorously defend the existing clean vehicle standards and fight to preserve one national clean vehicle program," she said. The EPA's decision "changes nothing in California and the 12 other states with clean-car rules that reduce emissions and improve gas mileage — those rules remain in place."

The efficiency gains that the U.S. auto fleet has made in recent decades have slowed since 2013, as gas prices dipped and the sale of pickup trucks and SUVs accelerated. In the document Pruitt signed Monday, he said the EPA had been "optimistic in its assumptions and projections" about the availability of technology to meet the standards and the agency recently had received substantial input from automakers that they needed to be scaled back.

He suggested that if cleaner vehicles are too expensive, consumers will hold onto older cars, thereby lowering the overall efficiency of cars on the road.

Peter Welch, president and chief executive of the National Automobile Dealers Association, said in a statement Monday that while the group supports "continuous improvements" in reducing vehicle emissions, "Standards alone — whatever they are — won't do the trick."

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, whose members produce 70 percent of the cars and light trucks sold in the United States, endorsed the shift. The group estimates that it would be more realistic to require the fleet to reach a miles-per-gallon target in the high 40s by 2025.

The U.S. fleet averaged 31.8 mpg for model year 2017, according to federal figures.

Alliance spokeswoman Gloria Bergquist said in an email that her members "support the administration for pursuing a data-driven effort and a single national program as it works to finalize future standards. We appreciate that the administration is working to find a way to both increase fuel economy standards and keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans."

But two auto companies, Ford and Honda, recently urged the government to maintain the current requirements but give manufacturers additional flexibility.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign, projected that retaining the Obama rule would cut carbon dioxide emissions by 6 billion tons and save 12 billion barrels of oil over the lifetime of vehicles complying with these standards. "Even though automakers are pushing gas-guzzling pickups and SUVs rather than more efficient cars, it's still the biggest step any nation has ever taken to cut global warming pollution and save oil," he said.

Two of Pruitt's predecessors were harshly critical.

"All they care about is undoing everything the prior administration did, and they'll use any excuse for doing that. They don't even have the industry itself asking for this," said Gina McCarthy, EPA administrator under President Barack Obama and now director of Harvard's Center for Health and the Global Environment.

McCarthy said that the standards set during the Obama era were based on extensive negotiations with states and the federal government, as well as the auto industry. "The decision I made was based on real information," while Pruitt's decision seemed to have no factual basis, she said.

And former EPA administrator Carol M. Browner, who helped forge the initial carbon thresholds for cars and light trucks in 2009 while serving in the Obama White House, took issue with Pruitt's allegation that officials in California are somehow at fault, saying "this idea that California is dictating or arbitrating for the rest of the country is not accurate."

Rather, Browner said, federal and state officials in past administrations worked to reach a compromise that gave certainty to automakers while moving the nation to embrace more fuel-efficient vehicles.

"There's an opportunity for us to lead the global market in cleaner, more efficient cars," she said. "But [Trump officials] are simply going to walk away from that opportunity."

AP
https://apnews.com/c2f9a453ae644a56bf14e35138820c1d/EPA-to-Roll-Back-Auto-Emissions-Standards
EPA to Roll Back Auto Emissions Standards
4/3/18

**embedded video clip*

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt talked about plans to ease emissions standards for cars and trucks at an announcement Tuesday morning.

AP
https://apnews.com/15263ac4791b4378a1ce1e2c4ae2c4b5/EPA-to-ease-back-emissions-standards
EPA to ease back emissions standards
4/3/18

Environmental regulators announced on Monday they will ease emissions standards for cars and trucks, saying that a timeline put in place by President Barack Obama was not appropriate and set standards "too high."

The Environmental Protection Agency said it completed a review that will affect vehicles for model years 2022-2025 but it did not specify details on new standards, which it said would be forthcoming. Current regulations from the EPA require the fleet of new vehicles to get 36 miles per gallon in real-world driving by 2025. That's about 10 mpg over the existing standard.

The agency said in its decision that the regulation set under the Obama administration "presents challenges for auto manufacturers due to feasibility and practicability, raises potential concerns related to automobile safety, and results in significant additional costs on consumers, especially low-income consumers."

The EPA, in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, will work to come up with new standards.

Automakers applauded Monday's decision, arguing that the current requirements would have cost the industry billions of dollars and raised vehicle prices due to the cost of developing the necessary technology.

"This was the right decision, and we support the Administration for pursuing a data-driven effort and a single national program as it works to finalize future standards," said Gloria Bergquist, vice president, communications and public affairs for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, in a statement. "We appreciate that the Administration is working to find a way to both increase fuel economy standards and keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans."

Environmentalists, meanwhile, warned the proposed rollbacks will make U.S. cars more expensive to fill up.

"No one in America is eager to buy a car that gets worse gas mileage and spews more pollution from its tailpipe," said Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund. "Designing and building cleaner, more cost-efficient cars is what helped automakers bounce back from the depths of the recession and will be key to America's global competitiveness in the years ahead."

Any change is likely to set up a lengthy legal showdown with California, which has the power to set its own pollution and gas mileage standards and doesn't want them to change. About a dozen other states follow California's rules, and together they account for more than one-third of the vehicles sold in the U.S. Currently the federal and California standards are the same.

Some conservative groups are pressing EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to get rid of the waiver that allows California to set its own rules. Pruitt said in a statement Monday that the agency will work with all states, including California, to finalize new standards.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," he said. "EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said his team is reviewing the EPA's determination.

"We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment," Becerra said in a statement. "California didn't become the sixth-largest economy in the world by spectating."

A joint statement by the governors of California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as the mayors of Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, also decried the EPA's decision.

"This move sets us back from years of advancements by the automotive industry put in motion by states that took the lead in setting emission standards," the statement said. "These standards have cleared the haze and smog from our cities and reversed decades of chronic air pollution problems, while putting more money in consumers' pockets."

Sen. Edward J. Markey said the existing standards are "technically feasible and economically achievable," and added that he would use every legislative tool to block the moves.

"Slashing these standards would amount to turning the keys to our energy policy over to Big Oil and the auto industry," said the Massachusetts Democrat, who is a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee and chair of the Senate Climate Task Force.

According to Markey, the standards are projected to save nearly 2.5 million barrels of oil a day by 2030, around as much oil as is imported from OPEC countries every day.

It could take a couple years for the EPA to propose new rules, gather public comment and finalize any changes. In the meantime, automakers have to proceed with plans for new cars and trucks under the current gas mileage requirements because it takes years to develop vehicles.

Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-epa-autos/epa-to-relax-fuel-efficiency-standards-for-autos-idUSKCN1H91OD
EPA to relax fuel efficiency standards for autos
By Timothy Gardner, 4/2/18, 2:23 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Trump administration on Monday rejected an Obama-era plan to make automobiles more fuel efficient, opening up a long process to weaken current standards and putting California and the federal government on a collision course over vehicle emissions.

Scott Pruitt, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, said in a statement that the standards on model year 2022 to 2025 vehicles were not appropriate and should be revised.

The Obama administration set the average fleet-wide fuel efficiency standards "too high" and "made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality," Pruitt said. He did not offer specifics on revising them.

The standards called for roughly doubling by 2025 the average fuel efficiency of new vehicles sold in the United States to about 50 miles (80 km) per gallon. Proponents said they could help spur innovation in clean technologies.

California has long been allowed by an EPA waiver to impose stricter standards than Washington does on vehicle emissions of some pollutants. And 12 other states, including New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, follow California's lead on cleaner cars.

That has set up a battle on vehicle efficiency between California, the most populous U.S. state and a massive car market, and the administration of President Donald Trump.

Pruitt is a big proponent of states' rights to regulate themselves, but opposes California's push for greener cars. California's waiver to impose its own efficiency standards is being re-examined, the EPA said.

It is in "America's best interest to have a national standard," Pruitt said in the release.

California Governor Jerry Brown blasted the EPA's action. "This cynical and meretricious abuse of power will poison our air and jeopardize the health of all Americans," Brown said.

Mary Nichols, the head of the California Air Resources Board, said her state "will vigorously defend the existing clean vehicle standards."

PATCHWORK OF RULES
Auto industry executives have not publicly sought specific reductions in the requirements negotiated with the Obama administration in 2011 as part of a bailout deal. But they have urged Pruitt and Trump to revise the Obama standards so it becomes easier and less costly to meet complex targets, which vary depending on the size of vehicles and whether they are classified as cars or trucks.

Automakers also want to avoid a patchwork of rules that would add costs to engine manufacturing.

"The best way to achieve our collective goals is under a single national program that provides an aggressive but achievable pathway, a variety of compliance tools, and factors in the role of customers," said John Bozzella, president and chief executive officer of the Association of Global Automakers.

Gloria Bergquist, a spokeswoman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said Pruitt made the right decision and that the administration was working on a way to both increase fuel economy and "keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans."

Changes to the standards could affect car manufacturers, including Ford Motor Co, General Motors Co and Tesla Inc

EPA chief Pruitt under pressure over lobbyist condo deal
Auto suppliers were cautiously optimistic about the creation of a national fuel efficiency plan. Steve Handschuh, head of the Motor and Equipment Manufacturers Association, said while his group supports adjustments and flexibilities "we do not support significant changes to the standards."

Environmentalists decried Pruitt's decision, saying stricter standards would slash emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Proponents of the corporate average fuel economy standards, or CAFE, say they have led to big gains in auto technology and that relaxing them could eventually hurt sales of U.S. cars in European and Asian countries that are moving toward mandates for electric cars.

It would "take America backward by jeopardizing successful safeguards that are working to clean our air, save drivers money at the pump, and drive technological innovation that creates jobs," said Luke Tonachel, a clean vehicles advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

NPR
https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/02/598888447/epa-moves-to-weaken-landmark-fuel-efficiency-rules
EPA Moves To Weaken Landmark Fuel Efficiency Rules
By Nathan Rott, 4/2/18, 5:11 PM

The Trump Administration today moved to weaken fuel economy standards for automobiles, saying the current ones are inappropriate and wrong.

The long-anticipated move is a win for auto manufacturers, which had lobbied for lower fuel-economy standards. It's also a rejection of one of former President Barack Obama's biggest efforts to combat climate change by curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

In making the announcement, Scott Pruitt, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, accused Obama of making incorrect assumptions when setting the standards, which led to them being set "too high."

The Obama administration, working with California, aimed to nearly double the fleet wide average fuel economy for passenger cars and SUVs to more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025.

Automobile emissions and transportation are one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

Pruitt's EPA is abandoning those goals and says it will work with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to set more appropriate standards at a later date.

The move puts the Trump administration on the path toward another legal showdown with California, which has said that it will keep the stricter air standards in place. The state has a federal waiver under the Clean Air Act that allows it to set its own standards for vehicle emissions. Twelve other states follow California's lead, and together they account for a third of all car sales in the U.S.

"This is a politically motivated effort to weaken clean vehicle standards with no documentation, evidence or law to back up that decision," said Mary Nichols, chair of the California Air Resources Board, in a statement. She accused EPA of aiming to "demolish the nation's clean car program."

Typically, the federal government and California work together to set shared auto emissions and fuel economy standards. Car manufacturers want uniformity nationwide, so they're not having to build different types of vehicles for consumers in different states.

But the Trump administration and California are at odds on a number of issues, and it's unclear if either side would be willing to make a concession.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," Pruitt said in a statement. "It's in everyone's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to working with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

The statement said California's environmental waiver "is still being reexamined by EPA."

California Gov. Jerry Brown also criticized the announcement.

"This cynical and meretricious abuse of power will poison our air and jeopardize the health of all Americans," he said in a statement.

Any split in the nation's car market would be troublesome for auto manufacturers, which had lobbied the Trump administration to lower the standards. They argued that with low gas prices, consumers are buying more larger vehicles — SUV's and pickup trucks — making the push for fuel-efficient electric vehicles and hybrids a costly burden. Lowering the fuel economy standards, they said, would give them more flexibility to meet consumer demands.

Jessica Caldwell, executive director of industry analysis at the automotive website Edmunds, said in a statement that flexibility will come with a cost.

"The unfortunate reality is that this decision comes with a logistical nightmare in the short term," she said. If states divide into a patchwork of competing fuel economy standards, while a long court battle drags out, "it puts automakers in a very challenging scenario from a product development perspective."

Bloomberg
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-03/u-s-carmakers-may-regret-what-they-wished-for-on-pollution-rule

U.S. Carmakers May Regret What They Wished For on Pollution Rules
By Ryan Beene, Jennifer A Dlouhy, and John Lippert, 4/3/18, 4:00 AM

The titans of Detroit's auto industry met with President Donald Trump four days after he took office and warned that jobs could be lost if the emission limits enacted by his predecessor weren't made more flexible.

On Monday, the Trump administration responded by agreeing to revise the Obama administration standards -- but in a way that may backfire on the automakers.

In announcing the decision, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt included a tacit threat that the federal government might no longer go along with California's smog-fighting policies. That could lead to pollution rules that vary state-by-state, greatly complicating life for the people making the cars.

"Automakers will get the flexibility they wished for, but at what cost?" said Jessica Caldwell, executive director of industry analysis at the car shopping website Edmunds. "The unfortunate reality is that this decision comes with a logistical nightmare in the short term."

After the EPA said that fuel-efficiency regulations for cars and light trucks were too stringent and Pruitt singled out California, officials of that state promptly vowed to defend its standards in court, signaling that years of litigation and uncertainty could lie ahead, further complicating an industry already facing profound change from self-driving cars and mobility services.

If the industry winds up with a patchwork of rules, "it's going to be a nightmare in California," Jim Lentz, chief executive of Toyota Motor Corp. in North America, said in an interview last week. "You may have people cross the border to buy a truck in Nevada and not in California," he said.

At the same time, Lentz said, automakers can't accept regulatory targets that force them to build cars customers don't want.

But for the Trump administration, this isn't solely about what automakers want. Trump's agencies have been methodically tearing up many of the signature policies of former President Barack Obama. Nowhere is that more true than with environmental rules, which represent the front line of Trump's vow to lift regulatory burdens that he says throttle economic development.

The EPA's move to pare Obama-era vehicle standards dovetails with other Trump efforts to roll back Obama policies combating climate change, including the Clean Power Plan that slashed greenhouse gas emissions at power plants and regulations governing methane leaks at oil wells. Easing requirements meant to save fuel also align with Trump's celebration of U.S. oil production and American "energy dominance."

Pruitt said the agency would work with California and other states. However, he said the agency was re-examining the Clean Air Act waiver that has given California unique authority to set its own clean-air rules since 1970, and that Sacramento wouldn't set auto efficiency rules for the nation.

“Cooperative federalism doesn’t mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," Pruitt said in the agency’s press release. "EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford -- while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars."

Twelve other states follow California’s emission rules, together accounting for about a third of the American automobile market.

The EPA will now begin drafting fresh auto standards for 2022-2025 alongside the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which has been developing new fuel economy targets for the same period. The new rules will be adjusted from current levels "as appropriate," Pruitt said.

Sacramento Versus Washington

California officials vowed to resist a Trump-led rollback of the federal targets, with state Attorney General Xavier Becerra threatening a lawsuit and Air Resources Board Chairman Mary Nichols blasting the EPA’s move as a bid to "demolish the nation’s clean car program."

"California will not weaken its nationally accepted clean car standards, and automakers will continue to meet those higher standards, bringing better gas mileage and less pollution for everyone," Nichols said in an emailed statement. "This decision takes the U.S. auto industry backward, and we will vigorously defend the existing clean vehicle standards and fight to preserve one national clean vehicle program."

Automakers and their trade associations applauded Pruitt’s decision but stressed the need to preserve a single set of aligned standards nationwide.

"Our priorities for modernizing the standards are the need for one national set of requirements and the need to comprehend new technology developments and increased shared and autonomous electric vehicles," General Motors Co. said in a statement. "We look forward to working with all parties on modernized standards that achieve better fuel economy for our customers and a better environment for everyone."

As the Trump administration begins rewriting the industry’s critical rules, automakers may not be in the driver’s seat. Instead, that role may go to influential free-market conservatives who for years have chafed at the federal government’s deference to California.

"Decisions about what kinds of cars people buy and drive should be made by the consumers themselves, not bureaucrats in Sacramento," said Thomas Pyle, president of the American Energy Alliance, a Washington advocacy group.

In a letter to Pruitt and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao on Monday, Pyle and 11 other conservative leaders argued that the administration should use its rewrite of the emissions rules to "restore the program to its original legal regime as laid out by Congress."

That could mean a single set of federal requirements dictated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration -- without separate emissions standards from the EPA and the California Air Resources Board.

Detroit’s Dilemma

"It is arguable that the EPA" and California "programs should not exist at all, as the EPA program is duplicative" of the federal corporate average fuel economy standards, and the California program "is preempted under federal law, which was ignored by the previous administration," wrote the conservatives, including Myron Ebell of the Competitive Enterprise Institute and Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform.

In most public comments over the past few weeks, automakers have tried to thread a rhetorical needle: advocating to ease the standards but imploring the Trump administration not to push so hard that California balks. Executives at Ford

Motor Co. and Honda Motor Co. all said they want more flexibility in the rules but not a rollback in overall stringency, with Ford brass writing "we support increasing clean car standards through 2025 and are not asking for a rollback."

Ford might not want a rollback, but the company may get one in large measure because of pressure brought to bear on Trump last year. In March 2017, at a California Air Resources Board meeting in Sacramento, Nichols issued a warning for the industry about what might come next.

“I want to turn to the industry representatives who are here and say, ‘what were you thinking when you threw yourselves on the mercy of the Trump administration to solve your problems?’’’ Nichols said.

CBS News
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/epas-auto-emissions-decision-sparks-a-fierce-battle/
EPA's auto emissions decision sparks a fierce battle
4/3/18, 8:45 AM

The fight over the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to ease emissions standards for cars and trucks began as soon as the announcement came. The Trump administration's EPA, led by Scott Pruitt, said the regulatory timeline put in place by President Barack Obama was inappropriate and set standards "too high."

Without specifying details, which the EPA said would be forthcoming, the agency said its review of rules would affect vehicles for model years 2022-2025. The current regulations call for the entire fleet of new vehicles to get 36 miles per gallon in real-world driving by 2025 -- about 10 mpg over the existing standard.

Automakers applauded Monday's decision, arguing that the current requirements would have cost the industry billions of dollars and raised vehicle prices due to the cost of developing the necessary technology.

"This was the right decision, and we support the Administration for pursuing a data-driven effort and a single national program as it works to finalize future standards," said Gloria Bergquist, vice president, communications and public affairs for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, in a statement. "We appreciate that the Administration is working to find a way to both increase fuel economy standards and keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans."

Environmentalists, however, warned the proposed rollbacks will make U.S. cars more expensive to fill up.

"No one in America is eager to buy a car that gets worse gas mileage and spews more pollution from its tailpipe," said Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund. "Designing and building cleaner, more cost-efficient cars is what helped automakers bounce back from the depths of the recession and will be key to America's global competitiveness in the years ahead."

In addition, any federal rule change is likely to set up a lengthy legal showdown with California, which has the power to set its own pollution and gas mileage standards and doesn't want them watered down. About a dozen other states follow California's rules, and together they account for more than one-third of the vehicles sold in the U.S. Currently the federal and California standards are the same.

That has some conservative groups pressing Pruitt to get rid of the waiver that allows California to set its own rules. The EPA secretary said in a statement Monday that the agency will work with all states, including California, to finalize new standards.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," he said. "EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford -- while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said his team is reviewing the EPA's determination.

"We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment," Becerra said in a statement. "California didn't become the sixth-largest economy in the world by spectating."

Also decrying the EPA's decision was a joint statement by the governors of California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as the mayors of Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle.

"This move sets us back from years of advancements by the automotive industry put in motion by states that took the lead in setting emission standards," the statement said. "These standards have cleared the haze and smog from our cities and reversed decades of chronic air pollution problems, while putting more money in consumers' pockets."

Sen. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., said the existing standards are "technically feasible and economically achievable," and he added that he would use every legislative tool to block the moves.

"Slashing these standards would amount to turning the keys to our energy policy over to Big Oil and the auto industry," said Markey, who's a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee and chair of the Senate Climate Task Force.

According to Markey, the standards are projected to save nearly 2.5 million barrels of oil a day by 2030, around as much oil as the U.S. imports from OPEC countries every day.

It could take a couple years for the EPA to propose new rules, gather public comment and finalize any changes. In the meantime, automakers have to proceed with plans for new cars and trucks under the current gas mileage requirements because it takes years to develop vehicles.

The agency said in its decision that the regulation set under the Obama administration "presents challenges for auto manufacturers due to feasibility and practicability, raises potential concerns related to automobile safety, and results in significant additional costs on consumers, especially low-income consumers."

The EPA said it will work to come up the new standards in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Getting there, however, promises to be anything but a joyride.

ABC News
http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-epa-rescinding-obama-era-auto-fuel-efficiency/story?id=54184178
Trump EPA moving to relax Obama-era auto fuel efficiency, emissions standards
By Erin Dooley, 4/2/18, 8:18 PM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is moving to relax fuel efficiency and emissions standards for vehicles manufactured between 2022 and 2025, the agency announced Monday –- something largely applauded by the auto industry, which has argued the standards set by the Obama administration are prohibitively expensive.

The current greenhouse gas regulations, codified just before Trump took office and requiring automakers to roughly double fuel economy to more than 50 mpg, would be replaced by a standard developed in conjunction with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, according to the EPA.

"The previous administration's determination was wrong," Pruitt said in a statement. "Obama's EPA ... made assumptions about the standards that didn't comport with reality and set the standards too high."

The EPA also plans to "reexamine" a waiver that allows California to set stricter standards than those mandated by the federal government. Unlike other states, California is legally allowed to seek an exemption to federal standards in favor of its own. Other states aren't allowed to apply for their own waiver but are allowed to adopt California's, which a dozen states have.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," Pruitt said. "It is in America's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

Already, California's Attorney General, Xavier Becerra, has threatened to sue.

"The Trump Administration's assault on clean car standards risks our ability to protect our children's health, tackle climate change, and save hardworking Americans money," Becerra said. "We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment. California didn't become the sixth-largest economy in the world by spectating."

New York, which adopted California's standard more than a decade ago, also may consider legal action.

New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman slammed the EPA's decision as an "illegal rollback" that would prompt "higher fuel costs and more dangerous air pollution."

A patchwork of differing environmental regulations could present a headache for the auto industry, potentially necessitating the development of multiple versions of each vehicle.

"Maintaining a single national program is critical," the Auto Alliance, an interest group that represents more than a dozen manufacturers, said in a statement.

The industry, the group argues, is committed to improving fuel economy, but insists that in order to do that, "the wisest course of action is to keep new vehicles affordable" so that consumers can replace old, less-efficient vehicles with newer models that pollute less.

Los Angeles Times
http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-epa-fuel-economy-20180403-story.html
Don't let Trump and Pruitt Make America Smoggy Again
By the Times Editorial Board, 4/3/18, 3:00 AM

The world is increasingly speeding toward a future of clean, zero-emissions cars. China — the largest auto market on the planet — plans to ban the sale of new vehicles powered by gasoline and diesel engines in the coming decades. Until then, the Chinese government requires that carmakers sell an increasing number of hybrid and electric vehicles in the country each year.

France, Britain, Norway and India have also pledged to phase out fossil fuel vehicles. And automakers have responded. Volvo pledged in 2017 to sell only hybrid or battery models starting next year, while General Motors, Ford, Volkswagen, Daimler and other big carmakers have said they will roll out more and more electric models to serve the growing market demand worldwide.

But here in the United States, President Trump and his anti-environmental protection sidekick, Scott Pruitt, are determined to head recklessly in the opposite direction. It's up to California and other environmentally responsible states to stop them.

On Monday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced it has abandoned ambitious but much-needed fuel economy rules that required automakers to step up the improvements in their cars' and SUVs' mileage and emissions. Adopted under the Obama administration, the regulations were a crucial piece of the national effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions and slow global climate change.

Indeed, the regulations being heedlessly ditched were slated to improve the average fuel economy of new cars and trucks 50% by 2025, to almost 55 miles per gallon. To meet the new standards, automakers were expected to develop and sell more hybrid and electric models, which, over time, would slash oil consumption, smoggy tailpipe pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.

Every other government in the industrialized world recognizes that climate change is real.

But those benefits apparently carried little weight with Pruitt, , a stalwart shill for the fossil fuel industry, who claims the Obama administration rushed the analysis of whether the regulations were feasible and set the standards too high. That's mere pretext, given that Pruitt has used his tenure at the EPA to systematically attack responsible, science- and health-based regulations. Nor, apparently, is it enough that he's weakened national environmental protections; Pruitt has suggested he may go after California's essential air quality regulations and climate change program as well.

In order to address the enormous contribution cars and trucks make to California's unusually severe air-quality problems, the federal Clean Air Act gave the state unique power to adopt vehicle emissions rules that are more stringent than the EPA's. The federal government can block the state rules only if the EPA deems them inconsistent with the Clean Air Act's efforts to protect public health or welfare. Thankfully, Gov. Jerry Brown and state leaders have made it clear that California is not rolling back its clean-car rules. Other states can follow California's lead on tailpipe standards, and a dozen states, representing about one-third of the U.S. auto market, have said they will continue to do so.

That would leave manufacturers with two options. They could go the costly route of making two versions of each vehicle: A more fuel-efficient model for states with California's standards, and a less fuel-efficient model for the rest of the country. Or carmakers may just comply with California's rules, which would negate the EPA's rollback. Or Pruitt and Trump could try to deny California its longstanding power to enact emissions standards, triggering (another) legal battle with the state.

It sure sounds like Pruitt is readying for a war. "Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," he said in a statement. California leaders, already practiced in Trump resistance, are digging in as well. The state has already intervened in a lawsuit filed by the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers to overturn the federal fuel-efficiency standards. Atty. Gen. Xavier Becerra said his office is prepared to sue again to "fight the administration's war on our environment."

Pruitt's efforts are a colossal waste of time and money. Every other government in the industrialized world recognizes that climate change is real and that it will take serious action now to minimize the devastating effects of global warming. The leading world economies also recognize that there is a much-needed shift from fossil fuel vehicles underway, and they are choosing to lead the transition to low- and no-carbon transportation systems.

Even automakers know this. That's why most of them are already developing and marketing electric and hybrid models to sell around the world. Instead of making progress toward innovation and a cleaner future, Trump and Pruitt have chosen to keep this country guzzling gas and pumping out carbon.

Fox News
http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/04/03/epa-pruitt-announce-rollback-obama-era-fuel-standards-setting-up-another-battle-with-california.html
EPA, Pruitt announce rollback of Obama-era fuel standards, setting up another battle with California
By Andrew O'Reilly, 4/3/18

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt laid out plans on Tuesday to roll back Obama-era fuel standards in a move seen as a win for automakers, but one that is likely to ignite a major political and legal battle with the nation's most populous state.

"These standards that were set were inappropriate and need to be revised," Pruitt said during a speech at the EPA in Washington D.C., adding that the rules are too expensive and hurt car buyers by making vehicles costlier.

"The focus should be on making cars that people actually buy and that are efficient," he said.

Pruitt's decision to rewrite the nation's first carbon limits on automobiles, which requires cars and light trucks sold in the United States to average more than 50 miles per gallon by 2025, reflects both the power of the country's automakers and the Trump administration's determination to jump start the car industry.

"This was the right decision, and we support the Administration for pursuing a data-driven effort and a single national program as it works to finalize future standards," the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which includes General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler, said in a statement. "We appreciate that the Administration is working to find a way to both increase fuel economy standards and keep new vehicles affordable to more Americans."

The move, however, once again pits the Trump administration against the state of California.

Under the 1970 Clean Air Act, California can set its own greenhouse gas emissions standards and has threatened to sue the federal government if its waiver is withdrawn and the state is blocked from imposing the more austere limits. A showdown between California and the Trump administration would have wide-ranging implications as currently 12 other states – making up more than a third of the U.S. auto market – follow the Golden State's emissions standards.

"The Trump Administration's assault on clean car standards risks our ability to protect our children's health, tackle climate change, and save hardworking Americans money," California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a statement on Monday. "We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment. California didn't become the sixth-largest economy in the world by spectating."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra discusses reports that wide-spread federal immigration raids may be planned soon in Northern California, at a news conference Thursday, Jan. 18, 2018, in Sacramento, Calif. Becerra warned employers that they must comply with a new California law that limits their cooperation with immigration officials. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)
California Attorney General Xavier Becerra. (Copyright 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.)

A coalition of at least 14 state attorneys general joined Becerra on Monday in calling the rollback "irrational and irresponsible" and vowing to "vigorously and aggressively challenge President Trump's dangerous anti-environmental agenda in court."

While Pruitt did not specifically address California during Tuesday's announcement, the administrator noted in a statement released Monday that the EPA would be reexamining California's waiver and that "[c]ooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country."

"EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars," he added. "It is in America's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

The move by the EPA is the latest in a series of battles between the federal government and California, which has emerged as the staunchest opponent to the Trump administration's policies. The EPA's announcement of the rollback occurred on the same day the Justice Department sued California to block a new state law limiting the transfers of federal lands.

"Yet again, Donald Trump and his administration are attacking our state and our very way of life," Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, a member of the State Lands Commission and a Democrat running for governor, said in a statement.

The Trump administration also wants to make it easier to drill for oil and gas off California's coast and last year's tax overhaul law is seen as particularly harmful to the state as it limits mortgage interest and state and local taxes.

Then there is the immigration debate, with the Justice Department suing California to overturn a state law that limits the power of federal immigration authorities and Trump recently calling the state "out of control" during a visit to view border wall prototypes.

Pruitt's announcement was originally scheduled for Monday at a Chevrolet car dealership in Chantilly, Virginia, but was cancelled. Guy Eberhart, the general manager of Pohanka Chevrolet, told Fox News that he had no knowledge of Pruitt planning to visit the dealership.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/381323-calif-to-fight-trumps-politically-motivated-car-standards-plan
Calif. to fight Trump's 'politically motivated' car standards plan
By Timothy Cama and Miranda Green, 4/2/18, 4:46 PM

California officials promised Monday to put up a fight against the Trump administration's newly announced decision to lower standards for car tailpipe emissions.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declared Monday afternoon that the Obama-era greenhouse gas rules for cars made between 2022 and 2025 are too ambitious and should be eased.

That sets up a fight with the Golden State, which currently sets its own car emissions rules and has argued for stringent regulations. Twelve other states currently follow those rules, accounting for a third of the nation's car market.

"This is a politically motivated effort to weaken clean vehicle standards with no documentation, evidence or law to back up that decision," Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board (CARB), said in a statement. "This is not a technical assessment, it is a move to demolish the nation's clean car program.

"EPA's action, if implemented, will worsen people's health with degraded air quality and undermine regulatory certainty for automakers."

Nichols said her agency would "vigorously defend" the current standards. It will also use a 2009 waiver from the Obama administration to keep enforcing the rules planned through 2025.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said Monday that he is still deciding whether to preserve California's authority to set its own rules or to revoke the waiver.

"Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," he said in a statement.

"EPA will set a national standard for greenhouse gas emissions that allows auto manufacturers to make cars that people both want and can afford — while still expanding environmental and safety benefits of newer cars," he said. "It is in America's best interest to have a national standard, and we look forward to partnering with all states, including California, as we work to finalize that standard."

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D) said Pruitt's declaration Monday "risks our ability to protect our children's health, tackle climate change, and save hardworking Americans money."

Becerra said he and the CARB were still reviewing the EPA's action but he is "ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards."

Gov. Jerry Brown (D) called the move a "belated April Fools' Day trick."

"This cynical and meretricious abuse of power will poison our air and jeopardize the health of all Americans," he continued.

Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.) joined in on Twitter, accusing Pruitt of "taking yet another step to undermine EPA's mission of protecting clean air and public health & this time it will also cost drivers billions at the pump."

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/california-ready-to-sue-if-pruitt-goes-after-car-waiver-930129
California ready to sue if Pruitt goes after car waiver
By Alex Guillen, 4/2/18, 4:13 PM

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said today he is ready and willing to take EPA to court if the agency tries to revoke the state's special waiver to enforce the existing auto emissions standards, as Administrator Scott Pruitt hinted he may do if the state does not go along.

"We're ready to file suit if needed to protect these critical standards and to fight the Administration's war on our environment," Becerra said in a statement.

EPA in 2009 granted California a waiver under the Clean Air Act to enforce more stringent auto emissions standards through model year 2025 vehicles. The 2012 regulation that created national standards included an agreement with California that any car that met the new standards would be deemed to have met California's as well.

But loosening the national standards would break that agreement, and California could enforce the higher standards within its own border. Another 12 states also follow California's rules, including New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

State officials have said they are optimistic California could win in court given its special treatment under the Clean Air Act.

California Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols echoed Becerra's sentiment.

"This is a politically motivated effort to weaken clean vehicle standards with no documentation, evidence or law to back up that decision," she said. "This decision takes the U.S. auto industry backward, and we will vigorously defend the existing clean vehicle standards and fight to preserve one national clean vehicle program."

USAToday
https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/04/02/mpg-standards-california-editorials-and-debates/459834002/
On mpg standards, let California be California (*Editorial)
By The Editorial Board, 4/2/18, 6:43 PM

For just shy of a decade, a set of tough emissions standards have required vehicles in America to burn fuel more efficiently — increasing miles per gallon, saving each driver hundreds of dollars at the pump and lowering carbon emissions that threaten the planet.

On Monday, the Trump administration announced plans to roll back these fuel efficiency standards for the years ahead. It's being done in the spirit of President Trump's anti-regulatory agenda, but this would be a major mistake for the planet and for drivers' pocketbooks.

It could also trigger a nasty showdown between the federal government and several states, led by California. The nation could wind up with two auto markets with competing emission standards, something Detroit doesn't want.

Under President Obama, two federal agencies, automakers and California reached an agreement in 2012 on a rising set of fuel emissions standards that have spawned a new generation of cleaner-running vehicles using lighter materials and advanced technology.

The result has been healthy improvement in fuel economy, to 25.2 miles per gallon last year. The target for a second phase, 2022-25, is about 50 mpg, which translates to about 35 mpg in real-world fleets.

That's an ambitious goal, perhaps overly so. There are conflicting studies on whether vehicles made lighter to comply with fuel efficiency standards are less safe in auto crashes. And no one wins when the government pressures automakers to build vehicles that consumers don't want to buy.

To curb consumption and emissions, we've long preferred an increase in the federal gas tax, or a carbon tax rebated to consumers. But if Congress refuses to go along with either of those approaches, reasonable fuel economy standards are worth preserving.

Monday's announcement by Scott Pruitt, the embattled Environmental Protection Agency administrator, sets the stage for a states-rights donnybrook. California has for years held a waiver, joined by 13 other states, allowing it to set more stringent emission standards. A second California waiver, joined by nine other states, requires a certain level of electric cars be sold in the state.

Gutting the efficiency standards means one or both of the California waivers would have to be revoked, or else automakers would be selling two categories of cars to American drivers.

Pruitt seems girded for battle, saying Monday that one state shouldn't be allowed to dictate standards for the rest of the nation.

A far wiser approach would be to resume negotiations among all the stakeholders. One possible deal discussed previously, but rejected by Pruitt, was relaxing 2025 standards in exchange for extending rules to 2030.

For the sake of a warming planet, let's hope that cooler heads prevail.

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/03/scott-pruitt-negative-press-coverage/
EPA's Scott Pruitt Is Getting Crushed Under The Weight Of Negative Press Coverage
By Michael Bastasch, 4/3/18, 11:30 AM

What started as a scandal over first class travel, the media's focus on Scott Pruitt has morphed into an investigation of his personal living arrangements in D.C. that could end poorly for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator.

Pruitt came under fire earlier this year for spending more than $100,000 on first class airline travel, which the EPA said were due to security concerns. The administrator also took fire for a costly $120,000 trip to Italy for the G7 summit, but that was only the beginning of the media scrutiny.

The White House is already investigating Pruitt's living arrangements after a slew of media reports indicated the former Oklahoma Attorney General rented a room from a D.C. power couple for $50 a night. There are already reports White House chief of staff John Kelly wanted to relieve Pruitt of duty.

That was before the Atlantic revealed on Tuesday that Pruitt used a provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act to give two staffers raises that were reportedly rejected by White House officials. While seemingly not illegal, Pruitt's circumvention raised the ire of EPA staffers and White House officials.

Pruitt's two-bedroom unit in the Capitol Hill condo is partially owned by the wife of J. Steven Hart of the firm Williams & Jensen. Pruitt only paid for nights he used the room, paying a total of $6,100 for the roughly six months he lived there, Bloomberg reported.

EPA's chief ethics counsel Justina Fugh told Bloomberg "the arrangement wasn't an ethics issue because Pruitt paid rent," and EPA released a memo from the agency's lead ethics officer on the lease.

"As EPA career ethics officials stated in a memo, Administrator Pruitt's housing arrangement for both himself and family was not a gift and the lease was consistent with federal ethics regulations," EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said in a statement.

However, the Environmental Integrity Project, the group behind many of the stories on Pruitt's travel, argued Pruitt's paying $50 in rent may violate a ban on federal employees taking gifts valued at more than $20. The group Public Citizen asked EPA's Office of Inspector General to investigate.

NYT columnist Paul Krugman went as far as to argue Pruitt's paying for a place to sleep constitutes a bribe.

Krugman, however, probably represents the extreme in this case. It's not really clear how Pruitt's paying for a room at a rate in the range of normal for that area of D.C. constitutes a bribe.

"He paid a fair price for what amounts to just a room," Fugh told Bloomberg. "So I don't even think that the fact that the house is owned by a person whose job is to be a lobbyist causes us concern."

The New York Times reported on Monday Pruitt rented the condo from Hart's wife when EPA approved an environmental permit for a pipeline project by Enbridge, which hired Williams & Jensen.

Again, Pruitt critics argued that "[e]ven if no specific favors were asked for or granted, it can create an appearance of a conflict," according to NYT.

"Entering into this arrangement causes a reasonable person to question the integrity of the E.P.A. decision," Don Fox, former general counsel for the Office of Government Ethics under Obama and Bush, told NYT.

However, lobbying disclosures presented by NYT don't show Williams & Jensen actually lobbying EPA on behalf of clients. The firm said it did not intervene with EPA decisions for its clients.

AP
https://apnews.com/af680012ce3d4447a97d033966d92f68/Trump-offers-support-to-embattled-EPA-head
Trump offers support to embattled EPA head
By Jonathan Lemire and Catherine Lucey, 4/3/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is offering strong support for Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency who is at the center of swirling ethics questions, the White House said Tuesday.

The president called Pruitt on Monday and told him that "we've got your back" and urged him to "keep his head up" and "keep fighting," according to two administration officials. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations.

White House chief of staff John Kelly reiterated those sentiments in a call to Pruitt Tuesday morning, according to the officials.

Pruitt has come under intense scrutiny for his use of a Capitol Hill condominium linked to a prominent Washington lobbyist whose firm represents fossil fuel companies. An agency ethics official at the EPA has insisted that Pruitt's lease didn't violate federal ethics rules.

A memo signed by Kevin Minoli contends that Pruitt's $50-a-night rental payments constitute a fair market rate. Pruitt's lease, however, required him to pay just for nights he occupied in the unit. Pruitt actually paid a total of $6,100 over the six month period he leased the property, an average of about $1,000 a month.

But current rental listings for two-bedroom apartments in the neighborhood show they typically go for far more than what Pruitt paid. A two bedroom townhome on the same block as the one leased by Pruitt was advertised for rent on Monday at $3,750 a month.

Pruitt also has come under increasing scrutiny for his extensive use of bodyguards and frequent taxpayer-funded travel, which has included first-class airline tickets. Though federal regulations typically require federal officials to fly in coach, the EPA chief has said he needed to sit in premium seats due to security concerns.

A Republican who previously served as the state attorney general of Oklahoma, Pruitt has long been a champion of the oil and gas industry. In the year he has served as the Trump administration's top environmental official, Pruitt has moved to scrap, gut or replace numerous environmental regulations opposed by the industry while boosting the continued burning of fossil fuels, which is the primary cause of climate change.

Trump is said to be fond of Pruitt and has cheered his moves to rollback regulations and do battle with environmental groups, according to a White House official.

The president's call to Pruitt comes just days after another Cabinet official, Veterans Affairs head David Shulkin, was dismissed amid ongoing ethics concerns. An inspector general's report concluded that Shulkin had inappropriately accepted travel and Wimbledon tickets, a charge the secretary denied.

Other Trump Cabinet members, including Secretary for Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson and Interior head Ryan Zinke have also faced questions about their expenditures.

Politico
https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/03/trump-and-kelly-phone-pruitt-as-damaging-reports-pile-up-498328
Trump and Kelly phone Pruitt as damaging reports pile up
By Andrew Restuccia, 4/3/18, 10:36 AM

President Donald Trump and White House chief of staff John Kelly each phoned Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt over the last 24 hours amid a series of damaging reports that have raised the possibility that Pruitt could be fired.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders confirmed that Trump spoke with Pruitt Monday night and Kelly talked to him Tuesday morning, but she declined to get into the substance of their conversations.

A White House official told POLITICO on Tuesday that Pruitt's future in the administration was uncertain, with the EPA chief facing mounting questions about his travel expenses, high security costs and the $50-a-night lodging he secured for several months last year in a lobbyist's Capitol Hill condo. On Tuesday, the Atlantic reported that Pruitt went around the White House to secure raises for two of his staffers.

POLITICO reported Monday that Kelly has discussed the possibility of recommending that Trump fire Pruitt. But other White House officials cautioned that no decisions had been made.

Some in the White House still believe Pruitt, despite the spate of bad press, is one of the most effective members of Trump's Cabinet in terms of policy. Pruitt is slated to announce on Tuesday plans to explore ways to relax vehicle emissions rules for model year 2022-2025.

And firing Pruitt could result in another messy confirmation battle for his successor. The Senate is already grappling with approving Trump's nominees for secretary of state, the CIA and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But other White House officials have been annoyed by Pruitt's alleged big ambitions, including reports that he is interested in replacing Jeff Sessions as attorney general and even in becoming president.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/381396-trump-backs-pruitt-amid-ethics-controversies
Trump backs Pruitt amid ethics controversies
By Jordan Fabian, 4/3/18, 10:01 AM

President Trump is giving Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt a vote of confidence, despite the mounting ethics troubles that are causing headaches for the administration.

A White House official said Trump phoned Pruitt on Monday night.

The president told the EPA chief to "keep your head up, keep fighting" and that "we have your back," according to multiple media reports.

White House chief of staff John Kelly called Pruitt Tuesday morning to reiterate Trump's message.

The calls come amid a flurry of negative headlines for Pruitt. The Atlantic reported Monday that Pruitt used an obscure legal provision to bypass the White House and give raises to two top staffers.

That came on the heels of a Washington Post report that the EPA considered a $100,000-per-month private jet lease for Pruitt, who already faces an inspector general probe into alleged travel abuses.

Pruitt is also under scrutiny for a $50-per-month condo lease linked to lobbyists whose clients later received approval for a pipeline expansion plan. The lobbyists and the EPA have denied any wrongdoing.

The disclosures have prompted calls from lawmakers for additional investigations into Pruitt's living situation, and some have demanded his resignation.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee has asked Pruitt for information on his rental agreement and Democrats on the House Oversight Committee are asking GOP leaders to open a probe into Cabinet travel controversies, including Pruitt's.

Trump has already parted ways with two Cabinet officials who were beset by ethics problems: Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price.

But the president is said to be pleased with the job Pruitt has done in rolling back environmental rules and regulations, one of Trump's core campaign promises.

Pruitt is announcing Tuesday that the administration will roll back Obama-era fuel efficiency standards for cars and light trucks.

Still, it's not clear how long Pruitt will enjoy Trump's confidence. The White House denied Trump had plans to oust national security adviser H.R. McMaster one week before the president replaced him with John Bolton.

Washington Times
https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/apr/3/donald-trump-tells-epa-chief-scott-pruitt-his-job-/
Trump tells EPA chief Pruitt his job is safe
By Dave Boyer, 4/3/18

President Trump has assured embattled EPA administrator Scott Pruitt that his job is safe amid questions about his travel and an unusual condo rental arrangement last year, according to reports.

The president told Mr. Pruitt in a phone call Monday night to "keep your head up" and "keep fighting," adding that the White House has "got your back," said an anonymous administration official. White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly reinforced that message in a phone call with Mr. Pruitt Tuesday morning, the official told Bloomberg.

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency has been under fire over revelations that last year he rented a Capitol Hill condo from the wife of a prominent energy lobbyist whose firm has clients regulated by the EPA. The lease terms permitted Mr. Pruitt to pay $50 only on days his bedroom in the unit was actually occupied, totaling $6,100 over a roughly six-month period.

Lawmakers have called for an investigation of Mr. Pruitt's reliance on first-class flights and frequent travel to his home state of Oklahoma.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/04/03/on-the-one-hand-pruitt-is-a-huge-ethical-headache-on-the-other-hes-doing-exactly-what-trump-wants/?utm_term=.cb031a1db59d
On one hand, Pruitt is a huge ethical headache. On the other, he's doing exactly what Trump wants.
By Philip Bump, 4/3/18, 1:36 PM

There were two competing news stories centered on Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt on Tuesday morning.

One of those stories was an extension of an ongoing scandal involving Pruitt's allocation of federal money. As first reported by the Atlantic, Pruitt leveraged a provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act to reappoint two longtime allies so that he could give them raises that the White House had rejected. One of those employees, Millan Hupp, was involved in Pruitt's personal search for housing last summer, an apparent violation of ethics rules. Pruitt was moving out of a condo for which he was paying only $50 a night — a condo owned by the wife of an energy-industry lobbyist, one of whose clients later received EPA approval for a project.

This is only one part of the current ethical questions surrounding Pruitt.

Another involves his spending at the EPA, including more than $100,000 on first-class flights, apparently because he'd been accosted by another passenger once when flying coach. The Post reported Monday that the EPA had considered a $100,000-a-month private jet contract but rejected it. Pruitt also has been criticized for spending more than $43,000 on a soundproof phone booth for his office.

All of that is a remarkable amount of negative coverage for a Cabinet member to receive. President Trump accepted Tom Price's resignation as health and human services secretary because of expensive air travel alone, but Pruitt has kept his head above water.

How? Well, that brings us to the other reason Pruitt was in the news Tuesday.

At an event in the morning, Pruitt announced that the EPA would be scaling back fuel-efficiency standards enacted under the Obama administration. What's more, the EPA plans to challenge California's higher standards, which, given the size of the state's car marketplace, have the effect of driving up the standard elsewhere in the country.

The Obama administration focused on fuel-efficiency standards as part of its broad look at how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change across the United States. As the EPA's website still notes, more than a quarter of emissions of greenhouse gas in the nation are from transportation, including gas being burned by cars. By increasing fuel efficiency, the argument went, we would reduce greenhouse gas emissions from that major source — and thereby help combat climate change.

But in March 2017, during a roundtable discussion with automakers, Trump pledged to revisit those rules that, he said, had the effect of "imposing painful new restrictions on the American automobile production lines and undermining our ability to compete with other countries and other places throughout the world, which are very, very competitive, believe me." (The fuel economy standard for American cars is already well below that of other countries and would stay lower even under the Obama guidelines.)

The point, though, is that Pruitt is doing exactly what Trump wants.

Pruitt was one of a slew of Cabinet nominees chosen by Trump seemingly for his direct opposition to the agency that he was going to lead. As attorney general in oil-rich Oklahoma, he sued the EPA multiple times. Since assuming the role of EPA administrator, he has been effective at curtailing the agency's regulatory efforts in several ways.

Among them:

- Scaling back the Clean Power Plan, which would have mandated lower greenhouse gas emissions at existing power plants.
- Released talking points on climate change aimed at playing down the role of human activity.
- Postponing a rule mandating that chemical plants warn the public about possible safety issues.
- Rejecting a ban on a pesticide linked to nervous system damage in children.
- Pushed to repeal emission standards for truck components.
- Repealed a rule aimed at giving the EPA broader authority over water pollution.
- Removed objective scientists from an EPA advisory board.
- Pruitt has emphasized a culture at the EPA focused on cutting regulations. He also has slowed enforcement actions against polluters.

This is what Pruitt was appointed to do. Trump's administration is heavily focused on cutting regulations to the benefit of business; Pruitt has been more effective in doing so at the EPA than many of his peers in Trump's Cabinet were. That's seemingly born of a genuine antipathy for the anti-pollution and anti-climate-change activism of the last administration.

So it's easy to see why Trump would be loath to replace him. Sure, whoever stepped in after Pruitt would be unlikely to suddenly embrace a hard-line stance toward polluters, given that he or she would be a Trump appointee. But Pruitt's enthusiasm — and effectiveness, as even his opponents would note — would be hard to match.

Trump reportedly called Pruitt on Monday night to offer his support. In comments to the media on Tuesday, though, his enthusiasm was not terribly robust.

"I hope he's going to be great," Trump said.

To Trump's eye, Pruitt's work at the EPA almost certainly has been great. It's just all that other stuff that's problematic.

MSNBC
http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/amid-scandal-the-epas-pruitt-has-chat-the-white-house
Amid scandal, the EPA's Pruitt has a chat with the White House
By Steve Benen, 4/3/18, 11:30 AM

Donald Trump's far-right EPA chief, Scott Pruitt, was already embroiled in controversy when last week's scandal broke. Pruitt lived in a lobbyist's home, paying below market-rate rents, while taking steps to benefit one of the lobbyist's clients.

Late yesterday, the New York Times moved the ball forward, reporting that the Environmental Protection Agency "signed off last March on a Canadian energy company's pipeline-expansion plan at the same time that the E.P.A. chief, Scott Pruitt, was renting a condominium linked to the energy company's powerful Washington lobbying firm."

The agency insists this was just a coincidence, though it's difficult under the circumstances to give Pruitt the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, the phrase "appearance of impropriety" exists for a reason.

Then the leaks started. The Washington Post reported late yesterday that Pruitt's aides "last year considered leasing a private jet on a month-to-month basis to accommodate his travel needs." The Atlantic reported this morning that the

White House balked at giving big pay raises to the EPA administrator's top two aides – but Pruitt found a way to get them the money anyway.

It's against this backdrop that the Oklahoma Republican had a chat with the White House yesterday. According to Bloomberg Politics, the call went well for the scandal-plagued EPA chief.

President Donald Trump called his embattled environmental chief Monday to assure him his job is safe amid mounting scrutiny of Scott Pruitt's travel, hiring practices and an unorthodox condo rental arrangement last year, according to an administration official.

The president told Pruitt, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, to "keep your head up" and "keep fighting," because the White House has "got your back" said the official, who asked not to be identified discussing personnel matters. That message was reinforced by White House Chief of Staff John Kelly in a telephone call to Pruitt on Tuesday morning, the official said.

If this report is accurate, it would appear Team Trump is entirely comfortable with Pruitt's alleged corruption, despite the seriousness of the evidence.

That said, there are a few things to keep in mind.

First, we don't know for certain that the latest reporting is accurate. Politico had a report on the phone calls, but it didn't characterize them quite the same way, stating that Pruitt's fate is still "uncertain."

Second, this White House has a habit of changing direction, especially on personnel matters. Last Monday, for example, White House officials confirmed that Trump had confidence in then-VA Secretary David Shulkin. Two days later, the president spoke with Shulkin over the phone, and they had a perfectly nice conversation about veterans' care.

Later that evening, Trump fired Shulkin.

Pruitt may remain a cabinet member in good standing this morning, but when it comes to predicting Trump's position by this evening, your guess is as good as mine.

But stepping back, it's important to consider the signal this White House would send if it doesn't fire Pruitt. The president is already facing allegations of corruption, but the problem will only intensify if Trump shows a tolerance for related abuses among those on his team.

As we discussed the other day, 12 years ago, with Republicans controlling the White House, the Senate, and the House, Democrats had a fair amount of success running against the GOP's "culture of corruption."

The party may want to consider dusting off that playbook.

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/03/scott-pruitt-potential-firing/
CNN Salivates At Scott Pruitt's Potential Demise
By Nick Gibas, 4/3/18, 11:22 AM

CNN commentator Chris Cillizza and Editor-in-Chief of The Daily Beast John Avlon excitedly discussed the potential firing of EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on "New Day" Tuesday and said he's starting to drag down President Donald Trump.

"I don't know how Scott Pruitt survives this because again, it's not one bad headline," Cillizza said. "I think what you're seeing here is them finding someone to take Scott Pruitt's job. It's seems to me more of a when, not if, in terms of him going."

Pruitt is currently being investigated for possible financial misconduct over a condo he rented from an energy lobbyist.

Host Alisyn Camerota chimed in to say The Washington Post called Pruitt "swamp monster," prompting Avlon to crack a few jokes.

WATCH:
*(*embedded video clip)*

"And usually you have to wear a costume to accomplish that," Avlon said laughing. "When you generate negative headlines and you provide distractions, the old rules of politics apply. Politics is perception."

Avlon asked Real Clear Politics associate editor A.B Stoddard why she thinks Trump hangs his cabinet members out to dry, and she claimed he gets enjoyment out of it.

"I think he enjoys it," Stoddard said. "I mean, people around him have said that he enjoys sort of a punishing experience to have the press speculate and say it's a matter of when not if. And them sort of walking around dejected with their demoralized agencies continuing to, you know, get more negative press before they're out the door."

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/article/2018/04/white-house-considered-firing-pruitt-453381
White House considered firing Pruitt
By Eliana Johnson, Alex Guillen, and Andrew Restucci, 4/2/18, 8:36 PM

White House chief of staff John Kelly has considered the firing of embattled Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt in the coming months as part of a wave of ousters of top officials causing headaches for the president, a senior administration official told POLITICO.

Pruitt is still hanging on for now, in part because Kelly wanted to wait for an upcoming EPA inspector general's report into his expensive travels, the senior official said. Another possible reason: Pruitt is doing the job President Donald Trump wants — including an announcement Monday that the agency will reverse the Obama administration's attempt to tighten fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks.

Multiple people close to the president still argue that Pruitt is one of Trump's most effective Cabinet members in making policy, despite the steady drumbeat of headlines about his lavish travel expenses, high security costs and, most recently, the $50-a-night lodging he secured for several months last year in a lobbyist's Capitol Hill condo.

His supporters say Monday's move on car and truck rules, long expected to land this week, is a case in point: It fulfills Trump's priority of reducing manufacturers' costs and will make life easier for automakers in states like Ohio and Michigan, while enraging liberals from California and other places that rejected the president in 2016.

"Scott Pruitt has proven that he's not afraid to stick his neck out and take on some big issues, and this is another example of that," said Myron Ebell, the energy director at the Competitive Enterprise Institute who ran Trump's EPA transition team. He added: "Now whether that helps him given his bad press on these other things, we'll have to wait and see."

Mike McKenna, an energy lobbyist who worked on the administration's transition team, said he doubts the recent news stories about Pruitt would even register with the White House when compared with his policy efforts, including the move to reverse fuel standards. "I think he's an A student. ... He's always working. He's always focused on the agenda. He's always trying to figure out ways to make the boss look good."

But the senior administration official, speaking anonymously to discuss internal policy deliberations, said Kelly had discussed firing Pruitt even before the latest revelations about his housing arrangements.

The official said Kelly had been waiting for the release of a forthcoming EPA inspector general's report on Pruitt's travels, which senior aides expected would be damning. Pruitt spent at least $163,000 on first-class flights, charter flights and a military jet during his first year at the agency, including stops in Paris and Morocco, POLITICO has reported based on EPA records.

Kelly and other aides were also waiting for IG reports on Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson and then-Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, the official said.

POLITICO reported last month that the top aides had been considering announcing ousters of several officials at once, including then-national security adviser H.R. McMaster, until Trump upended those plans by abruptly firing McMaster late last month. The president subsequently showed Shulkin the door last week.

Now Pruitt is in the position of trying to weather the latest bout of scandal and prove he's more valuable inside the Trump administration than on the outside.

White House aides have privately expressed exasperation with Pruitt in recent weeks over the series of negative stories that dominated headlines, paired with reports, including in POLITICO, that he was interested in replacing the even more embattled Jeff Sessions as attorney general. The issue of Pruitt's apparent big ambitions has roiled some in the White House, who often note that Trump is turned off by underlings who try to hog the spotlight.

Still, a second senior administration official told POLITICO last week that the White House stands behind Pruitt, even if the condo lease "probably does not show the best judgment." The official noted that Pruitt is "focused on enacting the Trump agenda."

Neither Pruitt nor Trump has commented publicly on the EPA leader's newest troubles, although EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said in a statement late Monday that "Administrator Pruitt is focused on advancing President Trump's agenda of regulatory certainty and environmental stewardship." As examples, Wilcox cited Pruitt's successful effort to persuade Trump to pull out of the Paris climate agreement, as well as work on repealing Obama's major climate and water regulations and "cleaning up toxic Superfund sites that have been languishing for decades."

But criticism of Pruitt has even come from inside the GOP: Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie — who briefly oversaw Trump's post-election transition, and who could be a contender to replace Sessions himself — said Sunday that he did not expect Pruitt to survive.

Democrats and environmental groups are also eager to show Pruitt the door, saying the furor over his lease with the lobbyist exemplifies what's wrong with the EPA chief's policies.

"The national media spotlight on the fact that he quite literally is in the bed of industry lobbyists really exposes the broader pattern that we've seen from Scott Pruitt from the beginning: that he expects favors from polluter lobbyists because he is doing favors for polluter lobbyists," said Jeremy Symons, vice president for political affairs at the Environmental Defense Fund.

Symons also disputed the notion that Pruitt has been a successful EPA leader, noting that courts have dealt multiple setbacks to his deregulatory efforts and Congress has rejected his proposed steep budget cuts.

"Yes, he has started things Trump wanted him to start, but I doubt that he will successfully finish things because he won't be here or because he's going to lose in the court of law," he said.

A similar court battle may await Pruitt's move on the auto emissions standards.

Those requirements, for cars and trucks from model years 2022 to 2025, stemmed from a deal among representatives of the Obama administration, the auto industry and the state of California. The deal called on carmakers to make their vehicles burn less gasoline to reduce carbon dioxide emissions — and at the time, Obama's officials said it would cause new cars and trucks to achieve an average fuel efficiency of 54.5 miles per gallon. (In practice, the figure would have been more like 36 mpg.)

Soon after taking office, Trump ordered EPA to reopen its review of the efficiency requirements at the urging of automakers. Pruitt had faced a Sunday deadline to decide whether to revisit the standards.

EPA's announcement Monday said the standards "are not appropriate and should be revised," leaving it for the agency to decide later what the new requirements should be.

Pruitt also opened the door to possibly ending a Clean Air Act waiver that allows California to set tougher anti-pollution rules than the federal government. "Cooperative federalism doesn't mean that one state can dictate standards for the rest of the country," Pruitt said, without explicitly saying he planned to revoke the waiver.

California officials excoriated Pruitt's announcement.

"This is a politically motivated effort to weaken clean vehicle standards with no documentation, evidence or law to back up that decision," Mary Nichols, who chairs the California Air Resources Board, said in a statement. She added, "This decision takes the U.S. auto industry backward, and we will vigorously defend the existing clean vehicle standards and fight to preserve one national clean vehicle program."

Former Hillary Clinton campaign manager John Podesta speculated Monday that Pruitt may not be in office long enough to see many EPA courtroom battles to their conclusion.

"At some point, it becomes untenable for the administration to keep putting up with this publicity," Podesta told MSNBC. He added: "I think the pressure is mounting on him, and at some point it's going to hit the breaking point."

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/381439-gop-rep-calls-for-pruitt-to-step-down-or-be-fired
GOP rep calls for Pruitt to step down or be fired
By Timothy Cama, 4/3/18, 1:13 PM

Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-Fla.) on Tuesday called for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt to either resign or be fired by President Trump.

Curbelo appears to be the first Republican lawmaker to publicly request Pruitt's dismissal.

In a Tuesday afternoon tweet, Curbello said Pruitt's "corruption scandals are an embarrassment to the Administration, and his conduct is grossly disrespectful to American taxpayers."
"It's time for him to resign or for [Trump] to dismiss him."

The tweet came amid numerous controversies centering on Pruitt. On Tuesday alone, The Atlantic reported that the EPA chief gave two staffers raises after the White House rejected his request to do so, and The Washington Post reported that one of the staffers helped Pruitt shop for an apartment.

Other recent reports have found that Pruitt rented a condo from the wife of an energy lobbyist for just $50 for each day he slept there, the EPA explored leasing a private jet for him and White House chief of staff John Kelly considered firing him.

Curbelo represents a politically balanced district where Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton won by 16 points. The Florida Republican consistently faces close elections and has a tough reelection bid ahead of him in November's midterm elections.

A poll commissioned by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and released Tuesday shows Curbelo with a narrow 45-40 lead over Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell.

Curbelo has frequently clashed with Pruitt, other Trump administration officials and the president himself. He's slammed the EPA head for working to repeal climate change policies, expressing doubt about climate science and opposing the Paris climate agreement.

Trump expressed support for Pruitt Tuesday, telling reporters, "I hope he's going to be great." Trump called Pruitt late Monday to say he and other leaders "have your back," and Kelly made a similar call Tuesday.

CNN
https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/03/politics/scott-pruitt-epa-donald-trump/index.html
Pruitt tension leads to Cabinet shuffle déjà vu
By Dan Merica, Kevin Liptak, and Kaitlan Collins, 4/3/18, 12:49 PM

Washington (CNN) - The White House on Tuesday found itself again embroiled in the foibles of a Cabinet secretary -- this time Environmental Protection Agency head Scott Pruitt, who has come under scrutiny by President Donald Trump's aides for living in a $50-per-night apartment owned by a lobbyist.

Amid questions about his standing in the administration, Trump phoned Pruitt on Monday night and told him to "keep your head up" and "keep fighting," an administration official said.
"We got your back," Trump told Pruitt, according to the official.

White House chief of staff John Kelly followed up with Pruitt on Tuesday morning and reinforced the President's message, the official added.

But the show of solidarity with the embattled environmental chief belied deep concerns within the White House about Pruitt's actions, which ethics experts have said raises questions about conflict of interests in his decisions about approving energy projects and rolling back regulations.

A White House official confirmed that both calls happened, but declined to disclose the content of each conversation, leaving in question how fulsomely the President backed his EPA head.

Trump himself offered only vague backing when questioned about Pruitt's standing during a meeting with Nordic leaders at the White House.

"I hope he's going to be great," Trump said Tuesday.

The White House is "looking into" Pruitt's housing situation, a person familiar with the matter told CNN on Monday evening. The inquiry, which was described more as a review of the situation than a formal inquest, is meant to determine if there were any ethics issues or wrongdoing. The White House has not yet made a conclusion on the matter.

Pruitt rented a room in a condo from Vicki and Steven Hart, lobbyists whose firm has lobbied the EPA on behalf of an Oklahoma Energy company. Pruitt leased a room for around $50 a night, only paying when he stayed there. In total, Pruitt paid $6,100 for the room over six months, a rate significantly lower than market value. Pruitt's landlords, the Harts, were among his political donors when he was an Oklahoma state official.

Cabinet déjà vu

Officials described a sense of déjà vu inside the West Wing as they grapple with a raft of new allegations against Pruitt -- just the latest of Trump's Cabinet officials to face ethics and legal questions. Similar scenarios played out before Trump dismissed Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin: aides are scrambling to sort out what is real and what isn't; they are demanding answers from Pruitt and the EPA; and they're bracing for Trump's inevitable fury at the negative headlines.

Trump has not indicated that he's ready to dismiss Pruitt, officials said, and his phone call on Tuesday reinforced -- for now -- the impression that Pruitt is temporarily secure in his job. But Trump is known to change course quickly, and there was little optimism inside the White House that Pruitt's standing would remain on solid ground.

Trump also reportedly held an upbeat phone call with Shulkin shortly before the top Veterans Affairs official was let go.

Responding to reports about Pruitt's shaky footing with the President, EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox hailed Pruitt's accomplishments in a statement on Monday evening.

"From advocating to leave the Paris Accord, working to repeal Obama's Clean Power Plan and WOTUS, and cleaning up toxic Superfund sites that have been languishing for decades, Administrator Pruitt is focused on advancing President Trump's agenda of regulatory certainty and environmental stewardship," Wilcox said.

Policy agenda moving forward

Trump has not identified a replacement for Pruitt should he decide to fire him, multiple senior officials said, and he remains enthusiastic about the progress his EPA has made toward deregulation and environmental rollbacks.

That, officials said, could make the difference for Pruitt, who is liked by the President. Previously fired officials such as Shulkin and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson failed to develop chemistry with the commander in chief, exacerbating their agencies' troubles and sealing their respective demises. But Trump is much fonder of Pruitt, and even recently floated him as a potential replacement for Jeff Sessions at the Justice Department.

Pruitt's aides took advantage of that suggestion, heavily pushing it to reporters, which irked Sessions's allies in the administration, who pointed out that the President often floats several people a day for jobs that aren't available.

On Tuesday, Pruitt openly flattered Trump amid reports that he is on shaky ground.

"This is another step in the President's regulatory agenda -- de-regulatory agenda, regulatory certainty, as Peter indicated, a billion dollars in savings with respect to over 22 significant regulatory actions that we've been involved in here at the agency," he said at an event at the EPA.

"This President has shown tremendous courage to say to the American people that America is going to be put first," he added.

One official at the White House described Pruitt as taking extra steps to curry favor with Trump, including suggesting tacking on additional import restrictions onto a review of fuel efficiency regulations as a way to strengthen the administration's aggressive stance on tariffs and trade.

The drafted restrictions would be unrealistic, according to this official, but Pruitt tried to "package it for the President so that it looks that way."

"He is trying so hard to please the President," the official said.

Aides suggested if Trump does replace Pruitt this week, it would be a much speedier timeline than occurred before the departures of Shulkin, Tillerson or national security adviser H.R. McMaster, all whom Trump let twist in the wind for weeks, if not months.

For his part, Pruitt was maintaining his schedule of events, albeit in a modified fashion. He announced new fuel standards at an event at EPA headquarters in downtown Washington, revealing little of the internal tumult which has gripped his agency.

He was originally planning to deliver the announcement at a Chevrolet dealership in Chantilly, Virginia, but the owner of the dealership, Jeff Pohanka, told CNN on Monday evening that the event had been canceled.

The Atlantic
https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/pruitt-epa/557123/
Scott Pruitt Bypassed the White House to Give Big Raises to Favorite Aides
By Elaina Plott and Robinson Meyer, 4/3/18, 5:00 AM

In early March, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt approached the White House with a request: He wanted substantial pay raises for two of his closest aides.

The aides, Sarah Greenwalt and Millan Hupp, were part of the small group of staffers who had traveled with Pruitt to Washington from Oklahoma, where he had served as attorney general. Greenwalt, a 30-year-old who had worked as Pruitt's general counsel in Oklahoma, was now his senior counsel at the EPA. Hupp, 26, was working on his political team before she moved to D.C. to become the agency's scheduling director.

Pruitt asked that Greenwalt's salary be raised from $107,435 to $164,200; Hupp's, from $86,460 to $114,590. Because both women were political appointees, he needed the White House to sign-off on their new pay.

According to a source with direct knowledge of the meeting, held in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, staffers from the Presidential Personnel Office dismissed Pruitt's application. The White House, the source said, declined to approve the raises.

So Pruitt found another way.

A provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act allows the EPA administrator to hire up to 30 people into the agency, without White House or congressional approval. The provision, meant to help expedite the hiring of experts and allow for more flexible staffing, became law in 1996. In past administrations, it has been used to hire specialists into custom-made roles in especially stressed offices, according to Bob Perciasepe, a former acting EPA administrator.

After the White House rejected their request, Pruitt's team studied the particulars of the Safe Drinking Water provision, according to the source with direct knowledge of these events. By reappointing Greenwalt and Hupp under this authority, they learned, Pruitt could exercise total control over their contracts and grant the raises on his own.

Pruitt ordered it done. Though Hupp and Greenwalt's duties did not change, the agency began processing them for raises of $28,130 and $56,765, respectively, compared with their 2017 salaries. Less than two weeks after Pruitt had approached the White House, according to time-stamped Human Resources documents shared with The Atlantic, the paperwork was finished.

Word of the raises quickly began to circulate through the agency. The episode infuriated some staffers; to some political aides, it was evidence of Pruitt's disregard for the White House's warnings to cabinet officials that they avoid even the appearance of impropriety. It also underscored the administrator's tendency to play favorites among his staff, according to two sources with direct knowledge of agency dynamics. Hupp, in particular, is making more than her Obama-era predecessor, a five-year veteran of the agency who did not break six figures until the final year of the administration, according to public records. (While Greenwalt has no obvious peer in the Obama administration, the EPA's general counsel had an annual salary of $155,500 in 2016.)

Said one EPA official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the press: "This whole thing has completely gutted any morale I had left to put up with this place."

Neither the White House nor the EPA replied to requests for comment.

The unusual hiring scheme comes amid new questions about Pruitt's ethics as administrator. The EPA chief rented a Capitol Hill apartment partly owned by the wife of a top energy lobbyist, paying just $50 per night for the space, according to an ABC News report last week. Pruitt also faces questions over his use of taxpayer money to make regular first- and business-class flights during his first year in office.

Now, in the wake of Greenwalt and Hupp's salary boosts, government watchdogs are deepening their probe of Pruitt's use of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Last May, Senate Democrats pressed the agency for answers about Pruitt's embrace of the provision. That month, for example, Pruitt used the law to hire Nancy Beck, a long-time lobbyist for the chemical industry, as the deputy head of the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. Historically, that role has been filled by a career civil servant or a political appointee.

Because she was hired administratively, and not appointed by the White House, Beck did not have to sign President Trump's ethics pledge, which mandates that Trump officials cannot work on an issue on which they had lobbied in the previous two years. Senators Tom Carper and Sheldon Whitehouse, top Democrats on the Environment and Public Works Committee, sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office requesting a probe into Beck's hiring. They were concerned, chiefly, that Pruitt was using the Safe Drinking Water hiring authority as a way for new employees to evade the ethics pledge.

"[The Safe Drinking Water Act] can be a legitimate way to bring on skilled experts the EPA needs to protect Americans' health and safety, but Administrator Pruitt seems more interested in using it to skirt ethics requirements, like the president's order banning hires from working on matters involving former employers or clients," Whitehouse said in a statement provided to The Atlantic.

While Carper and Whitehouse began submitting inquiries as early as last spring, it wasn't until March that the agency's own inspector general began seriously questioning many of the EPA's top political appointees about potential abuse of the hiring authority.

Now, staffers are waiting to see how officials will address the raises.

"It's a complete coincidence that Pruitt went behind the White House's back and used this in the most unethical way possible, just as the [inspector general] starts asking questions," said one EPA staffer. "Now they just have to connect the dots."

It's not as though Pruitt is the first EPA administrator to lean on the Safe Drinking Water Act hiring authority. EPA veterans of both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations said they were well-acquainted with the provision. But of the half-dozen former top EPA staffers interviewed for this article, not one could comprehend using it as a means of increasing salaries—especially following a rejection from the White House.

"I can't imagine that being done in the regime in which I served," said Stan Meiburg, a former acting deputy administrator of the EPA in the Obama administration. "It would have been very controversial. The accusation that would have been pinned on the administrator was that they were trying to give a private benefit using public funds."

Meiburg, who spent his career at the EPA after joining as career staff in 1977, said that "ADs"—the internal term for employees hired under the Safe Drinking Water Act—were considered a precious commodity inside the agency.

"The number of ADs were monitored very closely by the chief of staff," he said. "To get one was a big deal. To get one was not an easy task."

Christine Todd Whitman, the first EPA administrator under President George W. Bush, said she couldn't remember ever reclassifying a political appointee as an AD. "I don't even remember it being brought up as a potential or something to think about," she said.

As Meiburg noted, even appearing to convert a political appointee to an AD simply to give a salary raise could prove politically damaging. But other officials said the deeper effects would be felt inside the agency, where a transparent show of favoritism could inflame inter-office tensions and decrease morale. And in an office where staffers already jockey for favor among Pruitt's "posse," according to a source who works closely with the EPA, such a backlash is likely.

"It's already such a toxic work environment," the source said, requesting anonymity to speak candidly. "It's hard to see how it could get any worse."

Over the last several days, as press reports have zeroed in on Pruitt's living arrangements, this is the scandal that has seized the agency from the inside. If Pruitt was on thin ice with the White House before, the acceleration of the inquiry into his payroll practices may shatter it.

"We were once the president's favorite," said the EPA official. "Now we're the problem child."

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2018/04/03/epas-pruitt-gave-big-raises-to-two-close-aides-after-being-rebuffed-by-the-white-house/?utm_term=.6704cdf84b09
Top Pruitt aide at EPA also shopped for housing on his behalf
By Juliet Eilperin and Brady Dennis, 4/3/18, 12:02 PM

A top aide at the Environmental Protection Agency, who recently received a 33 percent raise from Administrator Scott Pruitt despite a lack of approval from the White House, helped shop for housing options for him and his wife last year, according to several individuals with knowledge of the matter.

Millan Hupp, 26, who serves as Pruitt's director of scheduling and advance, contacted a local real estate firm last summer as the EPA chief was moving out of a $50-per-night rental condo owned by the wife of an energy and transportation lobbyist. Three individuals, including current and former EPA employees, said Hupp was the point person for Pruitt's search.

Between July and September, Hupp corresponded with a real estate company and on some evenings and weekends went to view properties for rent or sale, according to two of the individuals. She typically used her private email but at times contacted the company during work hours. At other times, Pruitt himself viewed properties, the individuals said.

"This is not news," EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said in a statement. "The notion that government resources were used to assist in finding housing is categorically false. Administrator Pruitt and his wife looked at numerous housing options."

But Don Fox, the former acting director and general counsel of the Office of Government Ethics, said in an interview that federal officials are barred from enlisting one of their subordinates to do personal tasks for them, even if those take place during off hours.

"There's a general prohibition against misusing government resources, and employees are government resources," Fox said. "It's clearly personal, and frankly, it doesn't matter if she did it 11 a.m. on a Tuesday or at 2 p.m. on a Saturday if, in fact, that was an expectation of the job."

Hupp, who previously helped run a pair of political fundraising committees on Pruitt's behalf in Oklahoma, was one of two EPA employees who recently received significant raises, despite a lack of White House approval. Hupp's salary jumped nearly 33 percent last month, from $86,460 to $114,590.

After graduating in 2014 from Oklahoma State University, where she majored in hotel and restaurant administration, Hupp spent less than a year working at an Embassy Suites hotel near the Nashville airport as a business travel sales manager, according to her online résumé and LinkedIn page. In early 2015, according to her résumé, Hupp went to work for Pruitt as his deputy finance director, where her duties included hunting for new donors and a role as "on-the-ground orchestrator of activity for the Attorney General during political travel."

Around the same time, Hupp became a "financial and political consultant" for Pruitt's two private fundraising vehicles, Liberty 2.0 Super PAC and Oklahoma Strong Leadership PAC. In that role, she solicited donations to his political coffers and scheduled fundraising meetings and travel for him. Hupp was paid about $76,000 from the two PACs during 2015 and 2016, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Her sister, Sydney Hupp, also worked for the organizations on behalf of Pruitt, records show. Sydney Hupp spent four months last year as an "executive scheduler" for Pruitt, according to her LinkedIn profile. The profile states that she now works for a Republican political consulting firm, Absolute Resource Development, that lists Pruitt — in his capacity as the Oklahoma attorney general — as one of its clients.

Another EPA employee, 30-year-old Sarah Greenwalt, who serves as Pruitt's senior counsel after working with him in Oklahoma, also received a sharp raise in recent weeks. Her salary jumped more than 52 percent, from $107,435 to $164,200.

To hand out such raises, Pruitt used an obscure provision in the Safe Drinking Water Act after the White House refused to boost the two women's pay, according to two people with firsthand knowledge of the matter.

According to these individuals, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters, Pruitt reappointed both staff members under the authority of the act. That law allows the EPA chief to hire up to 30 people without presidential or congressional approval, which gave Pruitt the ability to set their salary levels himself.

The move to raise the two salaries, first reported Tuesday morning by the Atlantic, is the latest example of Pruitt's unorthodox approach to running the EPA and using federal money. Congressional Democrats and some ethics experts are increasingly questioning aspects of his leadership and operation.

He is already under scrutiny on several fronts, including his frequent first-class travel, which aides attribute to the elevated security threat he has faced, and his arrangement with the wife of an energy and transportation lobbyist to rent her Capitol Hill condo unit last year for $50 a night. Under that rental agreement, Pruitt paid only for lodging on the

nights when he stayed in the condo and did not pay an additional fee for his adult daughter to occupy a separate bedroom there.

While the White House did not respond immediately for a request for comment, multiple senior administration officials confirmed Tuesday that President Trump called Pruitt Monday night to convey his support. White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly followed up with a call Tuesday morning to reinforce that message, officials said.

The president told Pruitt, "Keep your head up, keep fighting. We have your back," according to these officials. CBS News first reported on the calls.

The two staffers suddenly in the spotlight both accompanied Pruitt on his trips to Italy and Morocco last year.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/epa-explored-private-jet-lease-for-pruitts-travels-last-year/2018/04/02/8651deb8-3607-11e8-8fd2-49fe3c675a89_story.html?utm_term=.0e34ae5fe318
EPA explored private jet lease for Pruitt's travels last year
By Juliet Eilperin and Brady Dennis, 4/2/18, 10:10 PM

Aides to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt last year considered leasing a private jet on a month-to-month basis to accommodate his travel needs, according to current and former agency officials.

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said the agency ultimately did not move forward with the plan because it would have been prohibitively expensive. Pruitt's aides had contacted NetJets, a well-known firm that leases such planes, and received a cost estimate of roughly $100,000 a month, the officials said.

"This is not news," EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said in a statement Monday. "EPA's [chief financial officer] regularly receives solicitations for this type of travel, we did our due diligence, found it was not as cost efficient and continued to fly commercial."

The idea was quickly scuttled after some top advisers objected, according to these individuals. Aides were discussing the arrangement before Tom Price resigned as secretary of health and human services amid revelations about costly flights he had taken aboard chartered planes.

NetJets, an Ohio-based company, declined to comment Monday.

News that Pruitt's team explored a six-figure contract for chartered flight comes as he is facing a number of ethics questions in addition to scrutiny from lawmakers of both parties about the many first-class domestic and international flights he took during his first year in office.

In recent weeks, the EPA turned over documents to House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) detailing $68,000 in newly disclosed travel costs for Pruitt since August.

That comes after The Washington Post reported on the tab for Pruitt's earlier travels, including a trip to Italy last June that cost the agency at least $120,000 for the administrator, his aides and his personal security detail.

EPA officials attribute the elevated expense of Pruitt's travels to the security precautions they have undertaken because of the number of threats he has received — especially compared with his immediate predecessors — since joining President Trump's Cabinet in February 2017. The agency has argued that Pruitt's predecessors also spent large sums on foreign travel, though they typically flew coach.

The administrator has received round-the-clock security protection since shortly after he took office. Last spring, the head of his security detail recommended he fly in first or business class after a confrontation in which a traveler made vulgar remarks to Pruitt, officials have said.

While it appears that Pruitt has primarily taken commercial flights, he has flown at least four times on noncommercial and military planes since mid-February, costing taxpayers more than $58,000. Those costs included $36,068 for a military jet to get him from a presidential event in Ohio to New York to catch a flight to Europe; a $5,719 chartered flight in Colorado to visit the site of a mine spill; and use of an Interior Department plane at a cost of $14,434.50 for meetings in Oklahoma.

All of those trips were signed off on by EPA ethics officials.

More recently, Pruitt has faced scrutiny over his installation of a $43,000 soundproof phone booth in his office and the disclosure that he rented an apartment in a prime location on Capitol Hill from a lobbyist couple, paying $50 per night only on the days he stayed at the property.

White House officials said late Monday that they were looking into Pruitt's rental arrangement last year but did not provide details about the probe.

CBS News
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/white-house-reportedly-reviewing-scott-pruitt-condo-tied-to-energy-industry-lobbyist/
White House reportedly reviewing Scott Pruitt's condo rental tied to energy lobbyist
4/3/18, 7:14 AM

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, is expected to announce Tuesday a reversal of tougher Obama-era standards for greenhouse gas emissions and auto fuel economy. As The Wall Street Journal reports, the White House is reviewing reports that Pruitt paid a below-market rate to live in a Washington condo tied to an energy industry lobbyist.

Pruitt is pitching the rollback of greenhouse gas emissions and fuel economy standards as something that will benefit consumers and the car industry, but it's expected to ignite a firestorm of criticism in Washington. Pruitt has previously questioned the impact of carbon dioxide emissions on the environment -- something President Trump also doubted on the campaign trail, reports CBS News' Chip Reid.

"I think that measuring with precision, human activity on the climate is something very challenging to do," Pruitt said on CNBC last March.

In a press release, the EPA announced the current carbon dioxide emission and fuel economy standards "are not appropriate and should be revised" but did not say what those revisions would be. The move could set up a legal fight between the Trump administration and California, which has vowed to stick with the current regulations and has a waiver through the Clean Air Act to set its own emissions standards.

The announcement comes as Pruitt is facing new ethics questions regarding a condo he rented from the wife of a top energy lobbyist. Until last July, Pruitt was renting a condo for $50 per night from the wife of Steven Hart, chairman of a top Washington lobbying firm. Hart's firm reportedly lobbied "to scale back Barack Obama-era EPA rules limiting greenhouse-gas emissions from existing power plants." The EPA also reportedly signed off on a pipeline plan for another company linked to the firm at the same time Pruitt was renting the condo.

In addition, Pruitt is facing questions about his first class plane travel, which cost taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars. Pruitt said it was necessary because of threats he received.

"The security detail that I had, they wanted me in a position on the plane to exit expeditiously if an incident arose," he told CBS News earlier this year.

In a statement to CBS News an EPA spokesperson said, "administrator Pruitt is focused on advancing President Trump's agenda of regulatory certainty and environmental stewardship."

There are reports that Pruitt's time at the EPA is coming to an end but last week, President Trump called Pruitt to say he was doing a good job.

Wall Street Journal
https://www.wsj.com/articles/white-house-probes-epa-chief-pruitt-over-his-links-to-lobbyist-1522711602
White House Probes EPA Chief Pruitt Over His Links to Lobbyist
By Peter Nicholas, 4/2/18, 7:26 PM

The White House is conducting a review of Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt's activities after reports that he had rented accommodations in Washington at below-market rates from the family of an energy lobbyist, a White House official said Monday.

While there is no sign yet that Mr. Pruitt's job is in jeopardy, another White House official said that few people are coming to Mr. Pruitt's defense. Mr. Pruitt has alienated some colleagues by making known his desire to succeed Jeff Sessions as attorney general should Mr. Sessions step down or be fired by President Donald Trump, this person said.

The purpose of the inquiry is to "dig a little deeper," the first official said, indicating that the White House isn't satisfied with a statement from the EPA last week that the $50-a-night lease agreement didn't violate federal ethics rules.

A memo from an EPA ethics official, dated March 30, said that if Mr. Pruitt were to have used the home for 30 days, the rent would come to $1,500. That sum, the official, Kevin Minoli, wrote, is "a reasonable market value."

Last week, the EPA defended Mr. Pruitt's living arrangement, releasing a statement that he had not run afoul of ethics rules. "As EPA career ethics officials stated in a memo, Administrator Pruitt's housing arrangement for both himself and family was not a gift and the lease was consistent with federal ethics regulations," said EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox.

The White House inquiry into Mr. Pruitt's actions comes at a moment of rapid turnover inside Mr. Trump's administration. Last month the president ousted a pair of cabinet secretaries: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Veterans Affairs chief David Shulkin. He also removed National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster.

Mr. Trump has in the past praised Mr. Pruitt, referring to him privately as "my lawyer," one White House official said.

The EPA chief also is one of several cabinet members to face scrutiny over their travel arrangements, another source of consternation at the White House, officials say.

The agency's Freedom of Information Act office last week released details of Mr. Pruitt's travel expenses since taking office, including dozens of short domestic flights in which he incurred four-figure bills, an apparent result of flying first class.

When international trips and a handful of chartered and military flights are included, Mr. Pruitt's travel costs appear to exceed $150,000 in the year since he became administrator.

Mr. Pruitt's travel arrangements are currently the subject of an investigation by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, the Wall Street Journal has reported.

The EPA has said that Mr. Pruitt's protective service detail moved him to a higher class "based on certain security protocols." Politico has reported that Mr. Pruitt's security team aimed to shield Mr. Pruitt from people accosting him on planes and in airports.

ABC News first reported last week that Mr. Pruitt in 2017 stayed in a townhouse on Capitol Hill co-owned by the wife a top energy lobbyist, J. Steven Hart.

The arrangement drew criticism from a Trump ally, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who served as Trump transition chairman until he was replaced by incoming Vice President Mike Pence a few days after the 2016 election.

Speaking on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday, Mr. Christie said of Mr. Pruitt: "I don't know how you survive this one and, if he has to go, it's because he never should have been there in the first place."

ABC News
http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/epa-chief-scott-pruitt-facing-calls-investigate-housing/story?id=54207260
EPA Chief Scott Pruitt facing more calls to investigate housing arrangement
By Stephanie Ebbs, 4/3/18, 2:53 PM

The White House confirmed Tuesday that President Donald Trump talked to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt on Monday night, amid growing calls for investigation into questions about the ethics of Pruitt's decisions as agency chief.

White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders confirmed that President Trump spoke with Pruitt and that White House chief of staff John Kelly called Pruitt on Tuesday morning. The White House would not confirm the content of those conversations.

The White House has launched a formal inquiry into Pruitt's arrangement to live in a Capitol Hill townhouse co-owned by the wife of a top lobbyist.

Trump was asked about the controversy surrounding Pruitt in a White House event Tuesday but only said "I hope he's going to be great."

The EPA also did not provide details on the call.

More members of Congress on Tuesday called on the EPA's inspector general to look into the arrangement.

Members of Congress have requested new investigations into the deal including whether ethics officials had all the information when they issued a statement that the deal did not violate the agency's gift rules because Pruitt paid market value for the room, even though he only paid $50 a night for nights that he stayed in the room.

The ethics decision did not mention possible conflicts of interest, or allegations of conflicts of interest, that could arise from the administrator of the EPA living with a lobbyist tied to energy groups.

ABC News reported last week that Pruitt rented a bedroom in a Capitol Hill condo for much of his first year in Washington. The condo is co-owned by Vicki Hart, the wife of lobbyist J. Steven Hart who has registered to lobby for companies with environmental or energy interests.

A spokesman for Hart said that he did not lobby the EPA or Department of Energy in 2017 or 2018. But the energy company Cheniere Energy, Inc. reported paying Hart's lobbying firm $80,000 in 2017.

Rep. Carlos Curbelo, R- Florida, weighed in on the controversy tweeting that Pruitt's corruption scandals are an embarrassment and that he should resign or be fired.

Rep. Carlos Curbelo
@RepCurbelo
Major policy differences aside, @EPAScottPruitt's corruption scandals are an embarrassment to the Administration, and his conduct is grossly disrespectful to American taxpayers. It's time for him to resign or for @POTUS to dismiss him.
https://twitter.com/jtsantucci/status/980963422534848512 ...

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee, asked the EPA's inspector general to look into whether Pruitt paid fair market value, the terms of the lease and whether the agreement was reviewed by agency ethics officials before it was reported.

In the letter Whitehouse cites guidance from the Office of Government Ethics that says government employees should consider declining a gift that may not technically violate gift rules if "their integrity or impartiality would be questioned if they were to accept the gift."

Reps. Ted Lieu, D-California, and Don Beyer, D- Virginia, also asked the inspector general to investigate in a letter on Tuesday.

In that letter, the Democrats ask the inspector general's office to look into discrepancies between the agency's ethics statement and other reports.

The ethics memo stated that the lease authorized the use of the condo by Pruitt and his immediate family, including his daughter McKenna Pruitt who stayed in a second bedroom during a White House internship.

But Vicki Hart previously told ABC News that she was not aware of other people using the bedrooms or living quarters and did not give permission for that.

"The OGC decision and Hart's statements cannot simultaneously be true. This discrepancy is further evidence of the need for the EPA Inspector General to conduct an investigation to determine if misconduct or mismanagement led to said OGC decision, and whether the Ethics Office was influenced in any improper manner," Lieu and Beyer wrote in the letter.

On Monday Democrats from the House Energy and Commerce Committee also asked the EPA to provide more information about the rental agreement. Republicans on that committee also said they have asked the EPA for more information.

The inspector general's office confirmed that they have received the letters and that he and his leadership team are reviewing the requests.

Republicans on committees that oversee the EPA, including chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee John Barrasso, have not responded to ABC News' requests for comment.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/democrats-question-pruitt-on-housing-arrangement-931331
Democrats question Pruitt on housing arrangement
By Alex Guillen, 4/2/18, 5:06 PM

Three House Democrats today wrote to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt asking questions about his arrangement renting a room from a lobbyist for $50 a night.

"We are concerned that the unique rental arrangement, in which you only paid rent on the nights you were in town for use of one bedroom in the home, could be a potential conflict of interest," wrote Reps. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) and Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.).

"As administrator, you have taken a number of actions to benefit industries regulated by EPA, and this news raises the possibility that you may have personally benefited from your relationship with industry," they added.

They included a series of questions about the arrangement, including how Pruitt determined he was paying fair market value, whether Pruitt left personal belongings in the room when staying there, whether anyone else ever stayed at the property and whether ethics official were aware of the situation.

The lawmakers also questioned whether Pruitt's December trip to Morocco to promote U.S. liquefied natural gas was connected to the living arrangement. The owner's husband, Steven Hart, is registered to lobby for LNG exporter Cheniere Energy.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/democrats-call-for-watchdog-investigation-of-pruitt-housing-935775
Democrats call for watchdog investigation of Pruitt housing
By Emily Holden, 4/3/18, 12:47 PM

Three Democratic lawmakers are asking EPA's inspector general to investigate Administrator Scott Pruitt's townhouse rental from an energy lobbyist last year.

Pruitt lived in a Capitol Hill condo co-owned by Vicki Hart, who is married to lobbyist Steven Hart, who represents companies including Cheniere Energy Inc. Pruitt paid $50 a night when he was there, or $6,100 over six months, and his daughter McKenna also lived in the condo while interning at the White House over the summer. The news is the latest in a series of damaging headlines for Pruitt.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) is questioning whether Pruitt paid market rate and whether the living arrangement constituted a gift from a lobbyist, "a potential violation of ethics rules," according to his letter.

Whitehouse suggests that ethics officials who approved of the situation after the news broke last week may not have been provided all the relevant information.

Kevin Minoli, EPA's principal deputy general counsel, wrote in a one-paragraph memo Friday that Pruitt was paying a "reasonable" market value and that the deal didn't constitute a gift, as defined under federal ethics regulations.

Reps. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) and Don Beyer (D-Va.) are also asking the agency watchdog to investigate "possible misconduct" surrounding the "after-the-fact ethics justification."

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox cited the memo from the career ethics officials and said "Administrator Pruitt's housing arrangement for both himself and family was not a gift and the lease was consistent with federal ethics regulations."

New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/02/climate/epa-pruitt-pipeline-apartment.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FEnvironmental%20Protection%20Agency
Pruitt Had a $50-a-Day Condo Linked to Lobbyists. Their Client's Project Got Approved.
By Eric Lipton, 3/2/18

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency signed off last March on a Canadian energy company's pipeline-expansion plan at the same time that the E.P.A. chief, Scott Pruitt, was renting a condominium linked to the energy company's powerful Washington lobbying firm.

Both the E.P.A. and the lobbying firm dispute that there was any connection between the agency's action and the condo rental, for which Mr. Pruitt was paying $50 a night.

"Any attempt to draw that link is patently false," Liz Bowman, a spokeswoman for Mr. Pruitt, said in a written statement.

Nevertheless, government ethics experts said that the correlation between the E.P.A.'s action and Mr. Pruitt's lease arrangement — he was renting from the wife of the head of the lobbying firm Williams & Jensen — illustrates why such ties to industry players can generate questions for public officials: Even if no specific favors were asked for or granted, it can create an appearance of a conflict.

"Entering into this arrangement causes a reasonable person to question the integrity of the E.P.A. decision," said Don Fox, who served as general counsel of the Office of Government Ethics during parts of the Obama and George W. Bush administrations.

The March 2017 action by the E.P.A. on the pipeline project — in the form of a letter telling the State Department that the E.P.A. had no serious environmental objections — meant that the project, an expansion of the Alberta Clipper line, had cleared a significant hurdle. The expansion, a project of Enbridge Inc., a Calgary-based energy company, would allow hundreds of thousands more barrels of oil a day to flow through this pipeline to the United States from Canadian tar sands.

The signoff by the E.P.A. came even though the agency, at the end of the Obama administration, had moved to fine Enbridge $61 million in connection with a 2010 pipeline episode that sent hundreds of thousands of gallons of crude oil into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan and other waterways. The fine was the second-largest in the history of the Clean Water Act, behind the penalty imposed after the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

A spokesman for Williams & Jensen said that the lobbying firm did not intervene with the E.P.A. or Mr. Pruitt on the Enbridge pipeline expansion either before or after Mr. Pruitt was living in the condo owned in part by Vicki Hart, the wife of J. Steven Hart, the chairman of the firm.

The lobbying firm also said it had not worked on similar regulatory issues for Enbridge in the past year, even though it was registered at the time as lobbying for the company on "issues affecting pipelines and construction of new pipelines," its disclosure report from early 2017 says.

Cynthia Giles, who served at the E.P.A. as an enforcement official in the agency's mid-Atlantic region in the 1990s before becoming an assistant administrator at the agency in the Obama administration, said Mr. Pruitt's housing arrangements raised questions about the fairness of the E.P.A.'s decision-making process.

"The people at the E.P.A. are charged with following the science and facts as it applies to individual decisions," she said. Appearing to accept favors from influential figures "is just not good judgment."

Ms. Bowman said the criticism was unjustified, saying that Mr. Pruitt paid what one E.P.A. official called a "market value" rent. However, an examination of Capitol Hill rentals suggests that rates typically are considerably higher and generally do not come with a provision, as Mr. Pruitt's did, that the renter can pay for only the nights stayed at the condo.

The E.P.A.'s review of the Alberta Clipper project was one of at least a half dozen regulatory matters before the E.P.A. related to clients who were represented by Williams & Jensen at the time that Mr. Pruitt was living part-time in the Capitol Hill condo.

Williams & Jensen, for example, was lobbying the E.P.A. early last year, according to its disclosure reports, on behalf of both Oklahoma Gas and Electric, a major coal-burning utility, and Concho Resources, a Texas-based oil and gas drilling company.

The work for Oklahoma Gas involved the effort to repeal or revise the landmark Obama-era rule that pushed states to move away from coal in favor of sources of electricity that produce fewer carbon emissions. An E.P.A. calendar in March 2017 shows that Mr. Pruitt and his chief of staff were scheduled to meet with company executives at the request of a Williams & Jensen lobbyist.

Brian Alford, a spokesman for Oklahoma Gas, said the company had received no favors from Mr. Pruitt. "By no means has O.G.E. benefited from any living arrangements for Administrator Pruitt," he said in a statement. "In fact, Administrator Pruitt did not attend the mentioned meeting."

Concho, a 2017 lobbying disclosure report shows, hired Williams & Jensen to help it handle matters including "EPA regulatory proposals re: oil and gas operations." The company's regulatory filings indicate its concerns included the regulation of methane emissions (a major factor in climate change) from drilling and production operations, as well as rules intended to protect drinking water supplies. Mr. Pruitt has considered revisions in both regulatory areas.

In the Enbridge case, the E.P.A. was asked to evaluate the potential environmental effect of the pipeline expansion application, as well as the quality of a preliminary review of the project that the State Department had already conducted. When the pipeline opened in 2010, it was permitted to carry only as much as 500,000 barrels of oil a day. The expansion would allow it to move an additional 390,000 barrels through a key three-mile section near the Canadian border.

Michael Barnes, a spokesman for Enbridge, said the project deserved to be approved, noting the "vital service that this existing pipeline provides in delivering secure and reliable supplies of North American crude oil to the United States."

The oil it carries comes from the so-called Canadian tar sands, like the oil for the proposed extension of the Keystone XL pipeline. Extraction from tar sands has drawn opposition from environmentalists, given that the process requires more energy than traditional drilling.

Pipelines, like this one, that cross an international border into the United States require a presidential permit, which is issued only after the State Department has conducted a detailed environmental review and has taken input from other federal agencies, including the E.P.A.

In this case, the pipeline expansion was further complicated by the fact that a related Enbridge pipeline involved in oil imports from Canada spilled nearly one million gallons of oil in Marshall, Mich., in July 2010 after tape intended to prevent corrosion on the pipeline failed. Investigators later found that employees allowed the oil to continue to flow after wrongly assuming that the alarms sounding were caused by a harmless vapor bubble.

Enbridge has argued it has learned from that accident and taken corrective measures to prevent it from happening again. The settlement with the E.P.A. also requires the company to spend at least $110 million to install advanced leak detection and monitoring measures to prevent spills.

In March 2017, while Mr. Pruitt's lease at the Washington condo was in effect, the E.P.A. issued a letter giving the pipeline project the second-best rating it offers out of 10 possible scores. The agency concluded that while the project raised "environmental concerns," the review had adequately examined the alternatives and determined that "no further analysis or data collection is necessary."

If the E.P.A. had wanted to more aggressively challenge the project, the agency could have rated it as "environmental objections" or "environmentally unsatisfactory."

The conclusion stands in contrast to a similar evaluation by the agency in 2013 of the Keystone XL pipeline project. That evaluation focused more on the effect that the flow of tar-sands oil could have on the goal of limiting global climate change and gave the project an "environmental objections" rating.

With the signoff by the E.P.A. and the State Department, Enbridge received the expansion permit it needed in October, five years after it first applied for permission. Additional pumping stations have already been built, meaning the pipeline expansion project is already completed, the company said.

Mr. Pruitt is separately the focus of an investigation by the E.P.A. inspector general, Arthur A. Elkins Jr., based on Mr. Pruitt's travel in early 2017 back to his home state of Oklahoma on government-funded flights, as well as his use of first-class tickets for flights and, at times, costly chartered planes.

Discussions have already started on Capitol Hill about asking the E.P.A. inspector general to expand his inquiry to include the condo deal. Late Monday, three House Democrats who serve on the committee with oversight of the E.P.A. sent a letter to Mr. Pruitt asking a series of questions about the condo lease, which was first reported by ABC News.

"As administrator you have taken a number of actions to benefit industries regulated by E.P.A.," the letter said. "And this news raises the possibility that you may have personally benefited from your relationship with industry."

ABC News
http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/democrats-questions-epa-pruitts-rental-agreement/story?id=54188788
White House, Dems seek EPA answers on Pruitt's rental deal
By John Santucci, Benjamin Siegel, and Matthew Mosk, 4/2/18, 9:49 PM

The White House has launched a formal inquiry into Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt's living situation last year at a Capitol Hill townhouse co-owned by the wife of a top lobbyist.

As ABC News first reported last week, Pruitt rented a bedroom in a Capitol Hill condo in 2017 that was partially owned by Vicki Hart, the wife of lobbyist J. Steven Hart, who was registered to lobby for several environmental and energy concerns. A spokesman for Hart said he has not directly lobbied the EPA on behalf of clients since Trump took office.

The unusual rental agreement allowed Pruitt to pay $50 a night for use of the condo, only paying for when he stayed over. He wound up spending more than $6,000, according to figures reported by Bloomberg.

"I don't know how you survive this one, and if he has to go, it's because he never should have been there in the first place," Chris Christie, an ABC News contributor and former governor of New Jersey, told ABC News Chief Anchor George Stephanopoulos Sunday on "This Week."

White House officials were quiet about the arrangement over the weekend, telling ABC News they were gathering facts.

President Donald Trump's friend Christopher Ruddy, a contributor to ABC News and the founder and CEO of news and opinion site Newsmax, said they didn't think the president was ready to add Pruitt to the list of departing aides and cabinet officials.

"The president looks very holistically at their whole job performance and I think he'll apply that same formula to Scott Pruitt," Ruddy said, adding Trump is not "going to throw somebody overboard just because there's one issue."

But interest in the arrangement was growing louder Monday. Democrats on the House panel with oversight over the Environmental Protection Agency sent the agency a letter with a first round of questions about Pruitt's controversial rental agreement.

"We are concerned that the unique rental arrangement, in which you only paid rent on the nights you were in town for use of one bedroom in the home, could be a potential conflict of interest," Reps. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., Diana DeGette, D-Colo., and Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., wrote in the letter.

Democrats want to know how Pruitt learned of the rental and whether he paid fair market value for the property, which they argue could have violated Pruitt's ethics pledge not to accept gifts from registered lobbyists. They also want to know whether Pruitt left any "personal materials" in the bedroom when he wasn't in town if the room was rented out to other tenants and whether he had access to other parts of the condo during his stays on Capitol Hill.

Asked about the Democrats' letter, a Republican committee aide told ABC News the panel has reached out to the EPA for further information about the arrangement.

Pruitt's daughter, McKenna Pruitt, used a second room in the condo during her White House internship last year, despite the claim from the EPA that Pruitt paid $50-a-night for a single bedroom in the brick townhouse steps away from congressional office buildings.

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said Friday that the arrangement was not a gift and that the lease was "consistent with federal ethics regulations." The agency released two statements from EPA ethics officials defending Pruitt's arrangement.

"Under the terms of the lease, if the space was utilized for one 30-day month, then the rental cost would be $1500, which is a reasonable market value," the EPA said in an ethics review released by the agency from principal deputy general counsel Kevin Minoli, the EPA's designated agency ethics official.

Other apartments in the Northeast Washington duplex have rented for as much as $5,000-a-month, a source familiar with a neighboring lease told ABC News last week.

Democrats have asked for a response from the EPA by Monday, April 16th, ahead of Pruitt's planned testimony before the panel on April 26th. Pruitt's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the Democratic inquiry.

The EPA inspector general is reviewing a request to investigate Pruitt's arrangement from Public Citizen, a nonpartisan watchdog group, a spokesperson said.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-swamp-monster-is-running-the-epa/2018/04/02/c82cd44c-36ab-11e8-9c0a-85d477d9a226_story.html?utm_term=.c75078e392f2

A swamp monster is running the EPA (*Editorial)
By the Editorial Board, 4/2/18, 7:32 PM

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY Administrator Scott Pruitt's ethics were already in question after he wasted taxpayer money on expensive plane tickets and hotels, a story he tried to rebut, misleadingly, on conservative talk radio last week. Then, last Thursday, ABC News reported that he benefited from a sweetheart deal that allowed him to live in a high-rent area of Washington while paying a relative pittance. His landlord? The wife of an energy and environmental lobbyist.

EPA officials tried to bury the story in official releases from ethics officers in the general counsel's office, arguing that Mr. Pruitt paid rent for his single bedroom in a Capitol Hill condo. According to Bloomberg News, these officials did not review the administrator's living arrangements in advance. Their after-the-fact defense of their boss is unpersuasive.

The administrator paid $50 a night for his room, a rate that is not outrageously low. Yet he paid only when he stayed in the condo. Though Mr. Pruitt supposedly rented only a single room, ABC News reported that his daughter stayed in a second bedroom when she interned at the White House. And, though he was apparently not supposed to use the condo's common areas, ABC found that his daughter regularly used the kitchen. EPA ethics official Justina Fugh described this as "a routine business transaction." Yet anyone who has suffered through finding a rental apartment in central Washington knows that reserving a bedroom for yourself at that price, paid for only sporadically and when you are in residence, without a year-long commitment, with a second bedroom available for family, is highly improbable if not impossible — without connections.

According to check records, Mr. Pruitt paid a total of $6,100 over six months for use of the Capitol Hill condo — the sort of sum that might land a young renter a basement unit in a less convenient neighborhood at best. The condo's co-owner, to whom Mr. Pruitt paid this paltry amount, is Vicki Hart, the wife of J. Steven Hart, whose firm represents energy companies. If Mr. Pruitt had paid fair rent on realistic terms, the connection would be merely concerning. In light of the cushy deal the administrator got, the arrangement is pure swamp.

Mr. Pruitt is by now familiar with public questions about his ethical habits. The Post revealed in February that the administrator regularly charged taxpayers for expensive first-class tickets and luxury hotel stays and kept his travel schedule unusually secret, breaking with precedent. Though Mr. Pruitt cited security concerns to justify his spending, federal rules say that front-of-the-plane travel is allowed only when "use of coach class accommodations would endanger your life or government property." The administrator announced last month that he would fly coach, a decision that suggests he could have avoided his previous profligacy, and one that he should have made from the start.

Given his ethical failings and his hostile approach to major environmental issues, Mr. Pruitt's tenure as the nation's top environmental enforcer, though brief, has already been far too long.

Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biofuels-epa-refineries-exclusive/exclusive-epa-gives-giant-refiner-a-hardship-waiver-from-regulation-idUSKCN1HA21P
Exclusive: EPA gives giant refiner a 'hardship' waiver from regulation
By Jarrett Renshaw, 4/3/18, 12:03 PM

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The Environmental Protection Agency has exempted one of the nation's largest oil refining companies, Andeavor (ANDV.N), from complying with U.S. biofuels regulations - a waiver historically reserved for tiny operations in danger of going belly up, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The exemption, which applies to the three smallest of Andeavor's ten refineries, marks the first evidence of the EPA freeing a highly profitable multi-billion dollar company from the costly mandates of the U.S. Renewable Fuel Standard.

The law requires refiners to blend biofuels such as ethanol into gasoline or purchase credits from those who do such blending.

The decision, which has not been previously reported, raises the question of whether other big and profitable oil firms with small refineries - such as Exxon Mobil Corp (XOM), Chevron Corp (CVX.N) and Phillips 66 (PSX.N) - also have or could receive the waivers, which are granted by the EPA in secret.

Such waivers were designed for refineries producing less than 75,000 barrels per day that can demonstrate that they suffer a "disproportionate economic hardship" from the costs of RFS compliance.

Andeavor posted net profits of about $1.5 billion last year.

The EPA exemption, granted about a month ago, could reduce Andeavor's regulatory costs by more than $50 million this year, based on the number of biofuels credits that two brokers say the refiner recently sold into the market, along with previous disclosures by firms that own refineries of a similar size.

Biofuels credit prices tied to ethanol dropped by 6 cents, to 38 cents each, after Reuters reported Andeavor's exemption, traders said. Andeavor shares jumped by more than 1 percent on the news, hitting a session high of $102.78.

The exemption releases the firm of its obligation to provide the EPA with biofuels credits proving compliance at the three refineries - two located in North Dakota and one in Utah - for the year 2016, which would have come due this year, the sources said. Andeavor is also asking EPA for a waiver for its 2017 obligations for the same refineries, but has not yet received a decision, the sources said.

Andeavor spokeswoman Destin Singleton declined to comment. EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman did not immediately comment in response to Reuters inquiries on Monday and Tuesday.

As a matter of policy, the agency refuses to release any information on the waivers, or to name their recipients, citing concerns over disclosing private business information. The EPA denied a Freedom of Information Act request from Reuters seeking information on companies receiving the waivers.

Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Phillips 66 also own refineries small enough to meet the barrel-per-day standard, as does billionaire investor and Trump ally Carl Icahn - whose efforts last year to overhaul the biofuels program drew scrutiny from federal investigators.

Icahn, majority owner of refiner CVR Energy (CVI.N), had served as an advisor to Trump on regulatory issues during his push to reform biofuels regulations early last year, but he resigned amid allegations that the role gave him a conflict of interest.

Spokespeople for all four companies declined to comment on whether they had applied for or received any exemptions.

The lucrative waivers are typically only reported if a publicly-traded firm considers them to be material to their financial or operational performance, in which case they must disclose the information through Securities and Exchange Commission filings.

The RFS has long been a lightning rod of conflict between the corn lobby, which supports the policy as an engine for demand, and refiners who say it costs them a fortune.

The White House has sought to broker a deal between two of its key political constituencies in a series of meetings, but the effort has failed to yield policy changes acceptable to both sides.

Ethanol industry advocates argue exemptions for refiners undermine the intent of the law, originally designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce dependence on foreign oil and boost farm economies.

While the EPA's motives in providing hardship waivers are unclear, the exemptions are one of the tools at the administration's disposal to ease financial pressure on refiners without undertaking a reform of the RFS policy.

EPA chief Scott Pruitt, appointed by Trump, has repeatedly said the RFS is too costly to oil refiners and should be overhauled. But Trump's Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, told an agriculture conference in February that Trump "stands with corn farmers, biofuels farmers and the RFS," according to a recording heard by Reuters.

White House spokeswoman Kelly Love did not respond to a question about whether the administration was expanding the use of the RFS waivers to help refiners. Bowman, of the EPA, also did not comment on the question.

LAWSUIT OVER 'HARDSHIP' STANDARD
Andeavor's waiver follows a successful lawsuit by another refiner, Sinclair Oil, last year challenging the strict standard the EPA has used under past administrations for determining financial hardship.

"The EPA's interpretation takes the statutory language too far," wrote Chief Judge Timothy Tymkovich of the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver. "A 'hardship' is something that makes one's life hard or difficult - not just something that makes continued existence impossible."

The lawsuit - along with a perception that the Trump administration might be more sympathetic to refiners - has sparked a big increase in applications from refining firms for he exemptions this year. More than 30 refineries have sought the waivers, according to sources familiar with the matter.

In a typical year, the EPA would receive about 12 to 15 requests for hardship exemptions and would grant about half of them, a former official familiar with the program told Reuters.

EXEMPTIONS SAVE REFINERS BIG BUCKS
Andeavor sold some 100 million of those credits to its competitors in recent weeks, according to two brokers in the biofuels credit market. The company otherwise would have needed to provide those credits to the EPA to prove compliance with the RFS.

Those credits would be worth about $58 million based on a Reuters calculation of average renewable fuel RIN prices this year.

In the past, other companies have said the exemptions they were granted saved them tens of millions of dollars, according to Securities and Exchange Commission filings.

Last year, for example, HollyFrontier disclosed a reduction of almost $58 million in its costs of credits for two refineries for 2016.

Such windfalls for oil firms come at the expense of the corn and ethanol industries, said Renewable Fuels Association Executive Vice President Geoff Cooper.

Refiners granted exemptions win in two ways: They no longer have to blend biofuels or buy credits to comply with the law, and they can sell any credits they had previously purchased to use for compliance.

The waivers, Cooper said in a post on the RFA web site, "are destroying demand for ethanol and corn."

BNA
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=131056908&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

EPA Aims for Predictable Chemical Reviews, Director Says
By Pat Rizzuto, 4/3/18

The EPA wants to give chemical makers a more predictable, efficient, and clear process to get new products to market to address industry criticism that the agency is thwarting innovation.

The Environmental Protection Agency is exploring how information technology, revising internal procedures, and better communication with chemical manufacturers could speed its pre-market chemical reviews, Jeffery Morris, director of the agency's chemicals office, told Bloomberg Environment.

Clearing procedural obstacles and improving communications would ease "huge headaches" companies have had since the EPA revised its new chemicals program, Jamie Conrad, an attorney with Conrad Law & Policy Counsel, told Bloomberg Environment.

The break-even point where a new chemical would become profitable has substantially increased since program changes resulting from the 2016 Toxic Substances Control Act amendments, Conrad said.

Chemical manufacturers that have asked the agency to allow them to make new chemicals since that law was amended include: Cargill Inc., which sought to make asphalt compounds; GE Water & Process Technologies, now called SUEZ, which sought to make a chemical it said could reduce chemical explosions in fuel storage, shipping vessels, and pipelines; and Inolex Inc., which sought to make a fabric softener.

Improving the transparency of the program so communities, workers, and others exposed to chemicals can grasp the rationales for agency decisions is critical, and it's required under the amended law, Richard Denison, lead senior scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund, told Bloomberg Environment.

Industry's Life Blood
EPA's new chemicals program "is the very life blood of industry, its heartbeat," said Karyn Schmidt, senior director for chemical regulation, regulatory, and technical affairs at the American Chemistry Council, a trade association that represents small, medium, and large chemical manufacturers operating in the U.S.

"New chemicals enable new products," Schmidt said.

New chemicals result from years of work and thousands of dollars of research investments, she said. When they get held up in prolonged agency reviews, the delay cascades through the supply chain, holding up potentially life-saving innovations, such as automotive air bags and new medical devices, she said.

Most of the environmental health groups Bloomberg Environment routinely speaks to recognize the benefits of chemicals, but want them and the products they enable to be safe. History shows that chemicals such as asbestos, lead, and DDT were widely used for their beneficial attributes before their legacies of disease, poisoning, and decimated wildlife populations were recognized, they say.

Three Focus Areas
EPA officials are working hard to make the program as predictable, efficient, and transparent as possible while satisfying all the requirements in the TSCA amendments, Morris said. Yet the agency's staff was not able to provide specific examples of possible solutions one week after Morris spoke with Bloomberg Environment.

First, the chemicals office is exploring computer technologies to see where they could more efficiently compile chemical analyses and reports, disseminate them, and help staff make decisions, he said.

Second, the agency is examining the analytical and other tasks the new chemicals staff carry out to see where they could be streamlined.

Third, the chemicals office wants to communicate the agency's initial findings to the companies in time for them to provide additional information that could aid the final decision.

Both the 1976 TSCA and the 2016 amendments give the EPA 90 days to review a new chemical. The amended law re-emphasized that deadline by allowing the agency one 90-day extension and directing the EPA to refund the new chemical review fees companies pay if the deadline isn't met, according to an EPA backgrounder.

Chemical trade associations often tell the agency at public meetings that new chemical reviews continue to take far longer than 90 days and that the agency has not issued refunds.

Encouraging Engagement

Conrad, Richard Engler—a senior chemist with Bergeson & Campbell, P.C.—and Lynn L. Bergeson, managing partner of that same law firm, described some specific types of problems they would like the agency to address.

Since 2016, the agency has encouraged companies to meet with EPA officials before they submit their pre-manufacture requests (PMNs) to make new chemicals.

While Conrad supports the concept, the reality is that during pre-submission meetings EPA officials just listen and give little indication of their approaches to available information. The company representative often leaves without understanding whether the types of information it plans to provide are what the agency wants or whether the agency even agrees with core aspects of the company's assumptions, he said.

Staff should be encouraged to share more of their preliminary thinking, he said.

Catching Inevitable Errors

The new chemicals program uses computer models to predict toxicity and exposures, and its analyses depend on presumptions—for example, conclusions about the extent to which a worker may be exposed to a chemical during various tasks— and mathematical analyses about ways chemicals move through the environment, said Engler, who formerly reviewed new chemicals during his 17 years at the agency.

Agency contractors do a lot of the initial analyses, and mistakes occur, he said. The initial analysis, for example, may inaccurately estimate how quickly or slowly a new chemical could move in air or water, Engler said.

"There are always going to be errors," he said. "The question is: When do you catch them?"

Since TSCA was amended, the chemical office's workload exploded, and many career staff retired or moved on, opening up the program to less experienced staff, some of whom have been detailed just for a few months, Engler said.

With less time, less experience, and new responsibilities, the EPA staff that oversee the contractors' work fail to catch mistakes, he said.

Product managers with the chemical maker or agency officials eventually find them, but that delays and complicates the review, Engler said.

Resolving divergent scientific perspectives on whether or not something is an error is made harder because company scientists are typically not allowed to speak with agency scientists, he said.

Instead, most exchanges are filtered through a program manager who is familiar with the process, but may not understand the specific science at issue.

The result can be rounds of telephone tag with repeated written requests, miscommunications, and misunderstandings, he added.

If the company and agency scientists were allowed to talk directly to each other that could save time, Engler said.

Denison said there's a role for EPA and chemical company discussions as the agency reviews new chemicals, and for companies to alter the PMNs to reflect those exchanges.

The agency's role, however, is to make its expectations clear, and leave it to manufacturers to meet those expectations, he said. The EPA shouldn't be a "nursemaid" to a company and provide round after round of opportunities to ensure the chemical can enter the marketplace, he said.

Public Accountability

The EPA must allow the public to view PMNs and related material that help them understand how the agency reached whatever conclusions it does about a new chemical, Denison said. Legitimate confidential business information will, necessarily, have to be redacted, he said.

The risk control measures chemical manufacturers agree to adopt after the agency objects to their initial plans may well be fully satisfactory, Denison said. But the only way the public can know that is if there's a paper trail.

A fundamental reason TSCA was overhauled was to enable the public to have confidence in the agency's chemical oversight, he said. Public confidence is built on transparent government decisions, Denison said.

"The only way for the EPA to be accountable is to know where it started, where it ended up, and why," Denison said.

Instead, the EPA has removed from its website what little information it provided about staff's initial concerns about a new chemical, he said. Critical documents are missing from the agency's public files, and those that are available often have redacted health and safety information that is not allowed to be kept secret, Denison said, repeating a point he has made in blogs.

Morris acknowledged the agency has deleted information about preliminary new chemical conclusions it used to post. The intent is to reduce sources of confusion, which can stem from the preliminary findings not reflecting the entire body of information the agency has reviewed when it makes its final conclusions, he said.

The agency wants to make more information public, but is wrestling with how best to do that, Morris said.

"We want to develop better reports that are more understandable to the public." he said.

Issue Draft Documents as Final

The EPA in December released two draft documents that could help resolve challenges if they were finalized, Bergeson said. They are New Chemicals Decision-Making Framework and New Chemicals Decision Guidelines Manual—Detailed Outline.

Final documents that clearly lay out what is needed, why, and how the office will consider the information could be useful in promoting predictability, she said.

E&E Greenwire

https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060078049/search?keyword=EPA

Acting deputy leaves today

By Kevin Bogardus, 4/3/18

Mike Flynn, U.S. EPA's acting deputy administrator, finishes his decadeslong tenure at the agency today.

Flynn said in an internal email obtained by E&E News that today will be his last day at the agency.

"I've had the great privilege and honor to serve alongside you for many years. I leave with mixed emotions, for I will miss my EPA family and the important work we do. But I take great comfort in knowing that you will continue to do all you can to protect our public health and the nation's environment," Flynn said in the email sent to EPA employees yesterday.

It's not clear who will replace Flynn as acting deputy. EPA press officials didn't respond to questions from E&E News on the agency's plans for the job.

The EPA deputy's departure also coincides with Administrator Scott Pruitt's mounting struggles with ethics allegations, raising speculation that the agency chief may soon be gone, too (see related story).

Flynn, a top career official, had announced in February his retirement today. Flynn joined EPA in 1980 and served in several of its program offices before being picked by the Obama administration to hold the deputy administrator position on an acting basis until President Trump nominated his replacement (E&E News PM, Feb. 21).

Before the two-week congressional recess, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) filed cloture on a number of pending nominations, including Andrew Wheeler, Trump's pick to be EPA deputy administrator.

A McConnell spokesman said today the Senate will vote on pending nominees in the order in which the leader filed cloture to end debate. Wheeler, a former longtime Republican aide to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee who has lobbied for coal giant Murray Energy Corp., has three nominees pending before him.

If Democrats agree to yield back debate time on any of the nominees, Wheeler could be confirmed as early as next week. However, the growing controversies surrounding Pruitt may represent new hurdles for Wheeler's quick confirmation.

With no deputy chief after Pruitt, Matt Leopold as EPA's general counsel would be the next in line to take charge of the agency if the administrator was unable to perform his duties under an executive order signed by President Obama in January last year. Various assistant administrators then follow Leopold in EPA's order of succession under the measure (Greenwire, Jan. 16, 2017).

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/02/environmentalists-trump-administration-epa/
Enviros Sue Trump's EPA For Relaxing Pollution Rule Targeting Power Plants
By Chris White, 4/2/18, 5:17 PM

Environmentalists sued the Environmental Protection Agency Monday after the agency allowed a select number of power plants to shutter some pollution controls.

The Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council, among others, asked a court to reconsider the rule change, which activists consider a loophole for polluters. The lawsuit comes as activists continue criticizing the President Donald Trump's administration's climate policies.

"Once again, the Trump administration is putting the health of polluter balance sheets over the health of our families and children," Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign director Mary Anne Hitt said in a statement. "Real people will pay the price with this cruel decision, and we will do everything we can to stop it."

The agency put out regulatory guidance in January repealing the "once in, always in" policy, which demanded power plants considered "major" sources of hazardous air pollutants were always regulated as such no matter their pollution mitigating efforts.

EPA's new guidance would "reduce regulatory burden for industries and the states, while continuing to ensure stringent and effective controls on hazardous air pollutants," EPA Air Office head William Wehrum said in the January guidance letter.

The "once in, always in" standard discouraged reducing pollution, Wehrum said. He targeted it as part of the Trump administration's overarching goal of cutting regulatory burdens. The four-page memorandum was published to the Federal Register without a public comment period.

EPA's new guidance came after the agency issued guidance March 13 to clear up uncertainties in obtaining air quality permits required to build or modify facilities, like power plants and refineries. The new guidance, or New Source Review (NSR), would make it easier to launch new projects or expand existing ones while maintaining air quality protections, EPA Chief Scott Pruitt said.

Companies put off installing new technology for years over NSR, industries argue.

BNA
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=131056907&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY
Judge Stingy With EPA on Plea for More Time on Late Air Limits
By David Schultz, 4/3/18

The EPA will have less than four years to complete reviews of air pollution standards for various industrial sectors, instead of the seven it sought citing a lack of resources.

A March 31 federal court ruling means the EPA will have until Oct. 1, 2021, to complete reviews of nine different air pollution regulations, including those covering copper smelting, spandex manufacturing, and mercury emissions from chlorine plants.

Ketanji Brown Jackson, a judge in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, said she was unpersuaded by the Environmental Protection Agency's arguments that its resources were stretched so thin that its air pollution analysts couldn't even begin to work on the standards until 2020.

"Making such a showing might be difficult, given the agency's current representations that it does not need additional funding from Congress to satisfy its obligations at this time," Jackson wrote in her ruling. The Trump administration sought significant cuts to the agency's funding in its fiscal year 2019 budget proposal.

The case centered on the EPA's failure to comply with a Clean Air Act mandate to periodically revise its air pollution standards for a variety of pollutants. While the EPA acknowledged that it did not meet the deadlines set out in the law, it had asked the court to grant it more time to come into compliance given that the agency is already struggling to comply with other court orders in similar blown-deadline cases.

The EPA was sued by a coalition of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, which has received funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the charitable organization founded by Michael Bloomberg, the ultimate owner of Bloomberg Environment.

The plaintiffs were represented by the law firm Earthjustice. The EPA was represented by the Department of Justice.

Connecticut Post
https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Ansonia-fined-for-hazardous-waste-12799724.php
Ansonia fined for hazardous waste
By Bill Cummings, 4/2/18, 4:01 PM

The City of Ansonia has agreed to pay $19,125 in penalties to settle allegations that it improperly regulated and handled toxic chemicals, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

A private company, Connecticut Oil Recyling Services, agreed to pay $32,397 to resolve the Toxics Substance Control Act violations.

"These actions demonstrate the importance that all parties involved with PCB waste take great care to ensure that every step in the handling and disposal process is done consistent with federal regulation," said Alexandra Dunn, regional administrator of EPA's New England office.

EPA said Ansonia failed to properly prepare a hazardous waste manifest when, on Aug. 2, 2016, it offered about 500 gallons of waste oil containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) to Connecticut Oil for transport from a city transfer station to an off-site facility for storage or disposal.

Connecticut Oil failed to prepare a hazardous waste manifest when several days later it brought a larger volume of PCB-contaminated oil, including the oil picked up from Ansonia, to a facility in New Haven for storage or disposal, EPA said.

Due to these omissions, more than 4,500 gallons of used oil was contaminated with levels of PCBs, which meant that the oil could not be recycled, EPA said.

Under the federal Toxic Substances Control Act, PCB waste must be disposed of as regulated waste rather than recycled for reuse. The company and the municipality have each certified that they have addressed the violations and the company is now in compliance with federal toxic substances law and PCB rules.

EPA's complaint alleged that the violations occurred even though city employees had previously sampled the oil at its transfer station for PCBs, received analytical results showing PCB concentrations above regulatory limits, and communicated the sampling results to Connecticut Oil before the company came to collect the waste oil. Connecticut Oil was already familiar with the PCB requirements since it had entered into another penalty settlement with EPA in 2015 resolving a substantially similar manifesting violation.

PCB regulations are intended to help reduce the chances for PCBs to be released into the environment and to limit any harm to human health or the environment if they are released. PCBs are classified by the EPA as a probable human carcinogen and have been demonstrated to cause a variety of other adverse health effects on the immune system, reproductive system, nervous system and endocrine system.