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 - 4 April 2018

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Washington Examiner - EPA's Scott Pruitt takes over all big decisions on America's waterways

CNN - Leaked memo: Pruitt taking control of Clean Water Act determinations

Renewable Fuel Standard

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Reuters - Ethanol group attacks EPA's deal to end refiner's bankruptcy

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The Hill - EPA Chief Scott Pruitt gets results — that's why he's a target of the left (*Op-Ed)

The Hill - President tells embattled EPA chief to stay strong

AP - EPA chief gets support from Trump, warning from White House

New York Times - For Scott Pruitt, a Spotlight Shines on His Ethics, Not His E.P.A. Rollbacks

Politico - Pruitt 'dumbfounded' rental from lobbyist is controversial

Daily Caller - Conservatives Will Have A Hard Time Ditching Scott Pruitt

Washington Examiner - EPA's Scott Pruitt lives to fight another day

Washington Post - The EPA once had a leader even more scandal-plagued than Pruitt. Here's how he's different

Washington Post - EPA's Scott Pruitt faces intensifying scrutiny, criticism of his ethics decisions

E&E Greenwire - Pruitt spread special hires throughout agency

Daily Caller - Vulnerable GOP Lawmaker Urges Trump To Oust Pruitt Over 'Corruption Scandals'

The Hill - Dem scrutinizes Pruitt's Morocco trip, gas industry ties

Politico - Whitehouse questions motivations behind Pruitt Morocco trip

General

CNN - EPA's Pruitt fulfilling Trump's anti-regulatory agenda

The Hill - Scott Pruitt's Trojan horse transparency proposal would undermine public health safeguards (*Op-Ed)

NPR - Working With Scott Pruitt

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The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/381590-epa-memo-gives-pruitt-more-power-over-water-protections-policy
Pruitt takes over authority for water protections policy
By Miranda Green, 4/4/18, 11:10 AM

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) head Scott Pruitt has signed a directive giving himself more authority to determine environmental regulations for projects near regional waterways, according to a memo released Wednesday.

The internal document obtained by the advocacy group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) gives the EPA chief final decision-making authority over the protections of streams, ponds and wetlands.

The one-page March 30 memo vests Pruitt the authority to make "final determinations of geographic jurisdiction," under the Clean Water Act, also known as the Water of the United States (WOTUS) rule.

The new order heavily downplays the role of local EPA experts in the field who in the past have made the final recommendations — and often decisions — regarding necessary environmental protections in their region.

The change will allow Pruitt to play a lead role in evaluating whether a project near waterways or wetlands would have negative environmental effects, affecting various projects including coal refineries and power plants.

In order to continue, the projects must receive permits from the Army Corps of Engineers as well as approval from the EPA.

EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman said the policy change is meant to centralize the agency's decision making. She maintained that local input will still be part of the process.

"This memo explains that jurisdictional determinations that raise significant issues or technical difficulties should be handled in a consistent and uniform manner, particularly during the WOTUS rulemaking," Bowman said.

"Regions will absolutely be involved in the process and work closely with the Administrator's office when doing the work to assess jurisdiction for very select, and often rare, cases."

Bowman said it would be an "exceedingly rare occurrence" where Pruitt makes the final call, saying he would likely only do so if there were significant issues or technical difficulties in determining which regional jurisdiction should make the decision.

"EPA would then get to make the jurisdictional call for these special cases instead of the [Army Corp of Engineers]. This provision is almost never used—the Corps makes thousands of jurisdictional determinations each year, whereas EPA may make one or two special case determinations each year (and many years, EPA makes none)," Bowman explained.

But environmentalists say that the change gives undue authority to Pruitt under WOTUS and could lead to increased pollution in various waterways across the country if the administrator seeks to downplay environmental regulations.

"This action subjects safeguards for clean water across the U.S. to filtration through one politician's hands," stated PEER's New England director Kyla Bennett, and former EPA employee. "Every corporation that wants a pass on Clean Water Act compliance is invited to privately meet with the most user-friendly EPA Administrator in history."

In February, the EPA under Pruitt suspended the Obama-era WOTUS bill from implementation for two years, promising to rewrite it to "reduce confusion and provide certainty to America's farmers and ranchers."

President Trump previously took aim at the rule during his presidential campaign, calling WOTUS "one of the worst examples of federal regulation."

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/epas-scott-pruitt-takes-over-all-big-decisions-on-americas-waterways
EPA's Scott Pruitt takes over all big decisions on America's waterways
By John Siciliano, 4/4/18, 12:28 PM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt has placed himself in charge of all decisions regarding the nation's waterways, throwing to the wayside the agency's regional offices that used to have some say on the matters, according to a leaked memo.

In the new directive, Pruitt states he will be making all final decisions when it comes to streams, ponds and wetlands.

The group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility provided CNN with a copy of the memo, which was dated March 30.

"With this revised delegation, authority previously delegated to regional administrators to make final determinations of geographic jurisdiction shall be retained by the administrator," the memo states.

It added that all regional administrators "involve the administrator's office early on in the process" on developing any final determinations on wetlands and waterways.

The move is being seen by activists as a way to centralize the EPA's authority in Washington, rather than delegate to the regional arms. That would give Pruitt the final say on whether an infrastructure or energy project, for example, has a negative environmental effect on waterways.

Projects could include anything from a coal mine to President Trump's border wall or "any other project that discharges ... fill material into a wetland or waterway," said the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

“This action subjects safeguards for clean water across the U.S. to filtration through one politician’s hands,” said Kyla Bennett, a former EPA employee who serves as the group's New England director. “Every corporation that wants a pass on Clean Water Act compliance is invited to privately meet with the most user-friendly EPA administrator in history.”

The memo comes as the agency is in the final stage of redefining what constitutes a U.S. waterway under its Water of the United States rule. The Obama administration rule was deemed as federal overreach by designating everything from ditches to streams as under the authority of the EPA's Clean Water Act Authority.

The Obama-era rule was stayed by the courts, which has reinforced the administration's resolve in redoing the water rule in a way that is deferential to states and development.

“This latest move by Pruitt is his Plan B as it is becoming increasingly clear that his Clean Water rewrite plan is illegal and will be tossed out in court,” Bennett said. “This amounts to a crude Clean Water Act coup d’état.”

Trump has directed agencies to find ways to streamline regulations under his infrastructure plan. The memo could be in response to that.

CNN
https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/04/politics/clean-water-act-epa-memo/index.html
Leaked memo: Pruitt taking control of Clean Water Act determinations
By Rene Marsh, 4/4/18, 9:50 AM

Key provisions in the Clean Water Act are now under the control of one person at the US Environmental Protection Agency -- Administrator Scott Pruitt, according to a leaked memo obtained by CNN.

In the new directive, Pruitt states he will make final critical decisions about preservation of streams, ponds and wetlands.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility provided CNN with a copy of the memo dated March 30, 2018. In the memo calling for "regulatory certainty," Pruitt directed EPA regional offices to "cede their Clean Water Act determinations" to him, said Kyla Bennett, the New England director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

The memo states: "With this revised delegation, authority previously delegated to regional administrators to make final determinations of geographic jurisdiction shall be retained by the Administrator. ... As part of effectuating this revision, I ask that you involve the Administrator's Office early on in the process of developing geographic determinations."

The move appears to change the approval process to lessen the role of EPA employees and scientists when it comes to evaluating whether a project has a significant negative environmental impact on waterways or wetlands.

These projects could be anything from transportation projects to new residential housing, coal mining, oil projects, even President Donald Trump's border wall or "any other project that discharges ... fill material into a wetland or waterway," according to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

The projects must receive permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and final approval from the EPA. Traditionally, regional EPA offices and career EPA scientists review the requests for permits to determine whether the project is detrimental to the local environment and the larger goal of waterway and wetland preservation.

Liz Bowman, an EPA spokeswoman, downplayed the memo in a statement.

"This memo explains that jurisdictional determinations that raise significant issues or technical difficulties should be handled in a consistent and uniform manner, particularly during the (Waters of the US) rulemaking. EPA's regional administrators will still need to be involved in this process; regions will work closely with the administrator's office when doing the work to assess jurisdiction for very select, and often rare, cases."

Environmentalists are sensitive to the changes because they say waterways, streams and wetlands are critical to the drinking supply and flood storage due to the impact of climate change. They're also necessary for fishery and wildlife habitats.

Scientists from the regional EPA offices go into the field to make the assessments.

"Now a man in DC who knows nothing about local environmental conditions will be making the decisions about wetlands and waterways he's probably never seen," Bennett said.

Before this memo, if a regional office determined it was best to veto a project proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers, EPA headquarters would approve the veto, Bennett said. "Headquarter approval was just a rubber stamp because they knew regional offices and scientists had the expertise," she said.

"This action subjects safeguards for clean water across the US to filtration through one politician's hands," said Bennett, an attorney, scientist and wetlands specialist who formerly worked for the EPA. "Every corporation that wants a pass on Clean Water Act compliance is invited to privately meet with the most user-friendly EPA administrator in history."

Bennett pointed out that last year, Pruitt announced a plan to shrink by as much as two-thirds the scope of the protected "Waters of the United States" rule that defines the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. Now, without waiting to outline, let alone complete, his legal rewrite, this new move will unilaterally nullify current standards, Bennett said.

"This latest move by Pruitt is his Plan B, as it is becoming increasingly clear that his Clean Water rewrite plan is illegal and will be tossed out in court," she said.

One of the authorities that makes the EPA powerful is its ability to review and veto permits for building projects.

Bennett says the move "emasculates" the agency.

Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-biofuels-epa-refineries/u-s-epa-grants-25-small-refineries-relief-from-biofuels-law-source-idUSL2N1RH1O6
U.S. EPA grants 25 small refineries relief from biofuels law - source
By Jarrett Renshaw, 4/4/18, 11:43 AM

NEW YORK, April 4 (Reuters) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency granted hardship exemptions from the nation's biofuel laws to 25 oil refineries in 2017, according to an agency source, representing a significant expansion of the waiver program.

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

Refiners, including large ones like Andeavor, applied for the hardship waivers in larger numbers in the wake of a federal appeals court ruling in August that said the EPA must expand the criteria for approving such waivers. (Reporting By Jarrett Renshaw Editing by Chizu Nomiyama)

Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/article/bankruptcy-philadelphiaenergy/ethanol-group-attacks-epas-deal-to-end-refiners-bankruptcy-idUSL2N1RH00T
Ethanol group attacks EPA's deal to end refiner's bankruptcy
By Jim Christie, 4/3/18, 8:20 PM

An ethanol trade group has launched a last-ditch effort to scuttle a deal between the Environmental Protection Agency and Philadelphia Energy Solutions aimed at helping the East Coast's largest refiner emerge from bankruptcy.

The settlement amounts to a sweetheart deal allowing PES to shed tens of millions of dollars in compliance costs under the U.S. Renewable Fuel Standard, Growth Energy argued in court papers filed on Monday.

To read the full story on Westlaw Practitioner Insights, click here: bit.ly/2uK1K9l

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Bloomberg
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-03/epa-drops-mention-of-climate-change-in-auto-emissions-reversal
EPA Drops Mention of 'Climate Change' in Auto-Emissions Reversal
By Ryan Beene, 4/3/18, 3:34 PM

The phrase "climate change" is nowhere to be found in the 38-page document outlining the Environmental Protection Agency's finding that auto efficiency standards enacted by the Obama administration to fight climate change are too aggressive.

The standards were the agency's first major effort to slash greenhouse-gas emissions after it determined the gases presented a hazard to public health.

Indeed, former EPA chief Gina McCarthy called climate change "the primary policy driver" of the auto rules and devoted 10 pages to climate science when she proposed in November 2016 that the standards through 2025 were feasible and should remain in place.

The revised final determination, released Monday by current EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, reversed that decision. It doesn't mention climate change or public health.

Among the reasons cited in the new document were auto industry comments that the costs of meeting the carbon targets could price some consumers out of the market, thus keeping older, less-efficient cars on the road for longer, undermining the goals of the rules.

The EPA isn't the first agency to scrub climate from its policy documents. In March, the Federal Emergency Management Agency released its latest four-year strategic plan; unlike the previous one, it didn't mention climate change, global warming or extreme weather -- the very factors scientists say are driving up disaster costs.

Noting the omission of "any mention of climate change or its impacts," the Union of Concerned Scientists called the EPA determination "basically a regurgitation" of talking points made by auto-industry trade associations.

"No other federal policy is delivering greater global warming emissions reductions than these vehicle standards," the environmental advocacy group said in an analysis. "If the EPA completely rolls back the regulations, as some have signaled, that will mean an additional half billion tons of global warming emissions just from the vehicles sold between 2022-2025."

Wall Street Journal
https://www.wsj.com/articles/epa-chief-echoes-car-makers-on-plan-to-scrap-fuel-standards-1522789919?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=3
EPA Chief Echoes Car Makers on Plan to Scrap Fuel Standards
By Timothy Puko, 4/3/18, 5:11 PM

WASHINGTON—Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt said Tuesday that his plans for repealing Obama-era fuel economy standards are aimed at improving the efficiency of cars that people want to buy, embracing an argument manufacturers have made for years about easing the standards.

Mr. Pruitt is starting a process to redraft the rules that set how many miles cars and trucks can cover on a gallon of gasoline, announcing this week that his staff had determined rules completed in the waning weeks of the Obama administration were too strict. Consumers aren't buying as many electric and low-emission vehicles as the Obama administration had anticipated, making it unlikely auto makers will be able to lower the total tailpipe emissions enough to meet the rules, the EPA says.

"The focus in the past has been on making manufacturers...make cars that people aren't willing to buy," Mr. Pruitt said at an event at EPA headquarters Tuesday to announce the standards. "Our focus should be on making cars that people purchase actually more efficient."

The assessment echoes claims from the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and other industry trade groups, some of whom joined Mr. Pruitt at the event. Leaders of the National Automobile Dealers Association and the Association of Global Automakers spoke before and after Mr. Pruitt, with the alliance's president following them. Signs reading "CERTAINTY" and "JOBS" flanked the podium, and the crowd filled with people from interest groups including the Cato Institute and Competitive Enterprise Institute, some of whom also held similar signs.

The Obama EPA set the standards for vehicle model years 2022-2025 rising to roughly 36 mpg in real-world driving by 2025, based on complex government calculations averaged out over all vehicles sold. Sales of pickup trucks and sport-utility vehicles have soared in recent years after oil prices unexpectedly plummeted, now accounting for more than 60% of the U.S. market. That countered a trend toward a more-efficient fleet and pushed auto makers to argue that current standards are too high.

Electric vehicles, which have no tailpipe emissions, account for only about 1% of the market, though sales are growing. Electric-vehicles sales hit a record last year, climbing even as sales across the industry plateaued.

Several Senate Democrats noted Tuesday nearly all auto makers endorsed the Obama administration's lofty fuel economy targets when they were proposed and codified. They did so knowing a viability assessment, known as the midterm evaluation, loomed on the horizon well before the toughest standards would be enforced. The Democrats also warned the EPA its decision could fracture policy across the country by angering leaders in California who have a waiver to set their own rules and have already said they intend to stick with the higher standard.

"These weakened fuel economy emissions standards will force Americans to forgo many of the benefits of the originally agreed upon standards: consumers will pay more at the pump, the United States will import more oil, and the country will emit more greenhouse gases," said a statement from the group, which includes Sens. Edward Markey of Massachusetts and Dianne Feinstein of California.

Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-epa-autos/u-s-states-vow-to-defend-auto-fuel-efficiency-standards-idUSKCN1HA2DI
U.S. states vow to defend auto fuel efficiency standards
By Timothy Gardner, 4/3/18, 2:32 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Nearly a dozen U.S. states and Washington D.C. on Tuesday promised to defend federal automobile efficiency standards against a rollback proposed this week by Scott Pruitt, the embattled head of the Environmental Protection Agency.

"All Americans ... deserve to enjoy fuel-efficient, low-emission cars and light trucks that save money on gas, improve our health and support American jobs," the attorneys general from 11 states said in a statement responding to Pruitt's proposal on Monday to ease the Obama-era standards.

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 say they help spur innovation in clean technologies and cut emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide.

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 follow California's lead on cleaner cars.

The attorneys general, from states including New York, Iowa and Massachusetts, said they would challenge a rollback in court. California Attorney General Xavier Becerra has already threatened to sue in defense of the standards.

The statement, also signed by more than 50 mayors from around the country, said automakers have been making progress in meeting the national standards and that compliance costs have been lower than projected.

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 President Donald Trump to revise the standards so it becomes easier and less costly to meet the targets.

Pruitt defended his decision at EPA headquarters on Tuesday.

"We have nothing to be apologetic about with respect to the progress we've made in reducing emissions as a country," Pruitt said. The EPA will make sure that U.S. consumers would not have to buy more expensive autos as a result of efficiency standards, he said.

Pruitt, a former attorney general of Oklahoma, a major oil producer, has been criticized by politicians after reports that he paid well below market rates to live in a condo owned by a lobbyist who deals with issues overseen by his agency. Trump and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly phoned Pruitt this week to say they support him, an administration source said on Tuesday.

The Daily Signal
https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/04/03/ethics-officials-okd-bedroom-rental-epa-chief-says/
EPA Chief Scott Pruitt Says Media Reports About Him Don't Tell True Story
By Fred Lucas, 4/3/18

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt defended his living arrangement in Washington during the presidential transition, noting that career ethics officials at the EPA found no problems with his choice of where to sleep.

"This was an Airbnb-type situation where I rented literally one room that was used in a temporary status until I found more permanent residence," @EPAScottPruitt says.

Media reports, Pruitt told The Daily Signal during an interview Tuesday, are incomplete and don't reflect "the truth."

"I think the information has been, as things go, I think very intermittent and very sporadic and not terribly complete with respect to what the truth is," Pruitt said in the interview.

As Pruitt on Monday announced a rollback of Obama administration fuel efficiency rules for vehicles in model years 2022 to 2025, multiple media reports focused on the EPA chief's renting of a bedroom on Capitol Hill.

Pruitt paid $50 a night to the wife of J. Steven Hart, chairman and CEO of the Washington law firm of Williams & Jensen, whose clients include energy companies. He paid Vicki Hart only for the nights he slept in the room at the condo, according to news reports and critics.

"We had a memo and a statement from career ethics officials here that have actually reviewed the lease, that actually reviewed comps—comparables of similar units," Pruitt, the former attorney general of Oklahoma, told The Daily Signal.

"And I think what's missed in this: I didn't rent a unit," Pruitt said. "I didn't rent an apartment. This was an Airbnb-type situation where I rented literally one room that was used in a temporary status, until I found more permanent residence."

This was during his early days in Washington after the president nominated him as EPA administrator, he said.

"My wife wasn't here yet. My children were back in Oklahoma," Pruitt said. "The needs were different. As soon as my wife came up, we moved to a different location where I couldn't just be living out of a suitcase."

In a March 30 memo, Kevin S. Minoli, the designated agency ethics official, to EPA General Counsel Matthew Z. Leopold, stated:

The regulations issued by the Office of Government Ethics are clear that if a federal employee pays market value for something, it is by definition not a gift under those regulations. ... Under the terms of the lease, if the space was utilized for one 30-day month, then the rental cost would be $1,500, which is a reasonable market value.

The lease authorized use by the Administrator and his immediate family, specifically including his spouse and children, and consistent with that provision of the lease his immediate family did stay there when they were in Washington, D.C. The lease did not require payment when the property was not utilized.

Neither of these two provisions render the rental cost under the lease as something other than market value. Therefore, entering into the lease was consistent with federal ethics regulations regarding gifts, and use of property in accordance with the lease agreement did not constitute a gift as defined in those regulations.

But in a letter Tuesday, two House Democrats, Reps. Ted Lieu of California and Don Beyer of Virginia, urged EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins Jr. to investigate the matter.

The lawmakers contend Pruitt didn't pay a fair market rate because he paid only for the days he stayed in the space:

Administrator Pruitt didn't pay $1,500 a month. He paid far less because the unusual lease allowed him to have the condo on demand but he only had to pay for the days he stayed at the condo. Over a period of six months, Administrator Pruitt paid only a total of $6,100 for the furnished condo. This is far below market value and, as such, would constitute an impermissible gift under federal regulations.

Asked about Pruitt on Tuesday, President Donald Trump told reporters: "I hope he's going to be great."

Trump reportedly called Pruitt on Monday and told him: "Keep your head up. Keep fighting. We got your back."

Pruitt also pushed back against reports that he rented space from an energy lobbyist.

"The other thing I would say is that the owner of the residence—people, I've heard, say that he's an energy lobbyist," Pruitt told The Daily Signal.

Speaking of Hart, Pruitt said: "He's the chairman of a law firm. I've know this gentleman for years. He's an Oklahoman, and his firm represents these [energy industry] clients, not him. There has been no connection whatsoever in that regard."

In addition to Trump's conversation Monday with Pruitt, according to media reports Tuesday, White House chief of staff John Kelly also spoke with the EPA administrator.

Pruitt declined to comment on media speculation regarding his future at the EPA.

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/scott-pruitt-washington-toxic-critics-trying-stop-trump-agenda

Embattled Scott Pruitt rips 'toxic' Washington, says critics 'will resort to anything' to stop Trump agenda
By Paul Bedard, 4/3/18, 6:25 PM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on Tuesday forcefully pushed back against criticism that he won a short-term sweetheart rental deal from a lobbyist friend, claiming it's just the latest attempt by his and the president's attackers to "resort to anything" to stop their agenda.

"There are people that have long in this town done business a different way and this agency has been the poster child of it. And so do I think that because we are leading on this agenda that there are some who want to keep that from happening? Absolutely. And do I think that they will resort to anything to achieve that? Yes," he said in an interview with Secrets.

"It's toxic here in that regard," said Pruitt, one of a handful of President's Trump's agency heads who is scoring wins on his pro-jobs, anti-regulatory campaign.

Pruitt, speaking confidently about his future, said that critics who have focused on his $50 a night room rental in an Airbnb-style townhouse and his air travel are really out to stop the administration's anti-regulatory effort that has saved $8 billion overall and $1 billion in reduced Environmental Protection Agency regulations.

"This president's courage and commitment to make those things happen and him empowering his teammates in each of these respective agencies to say go forth and get results and get accountability, it's happening. It's happening here, it's happening elsewhere. And do I think that is something that some folks don't like? Absolutely. And do I think they'll use any means to [stop] it? Absolutely. And it's frustrating," Pruitt told us.

The media have been suggesting that Pruitt is on the outs and could be dumped by the White House.

However, the White House Tuesday let it be known that the president called his environmental chief to tell him, "we've got your back." In the call, officials said Trump told Pruitt to "keep his head up" and to "keep fighting." That message was reiterated in a call from White House chief of staff John Kelly Tuesday, according to reports.

Other Trump agency heads have also come under fire, but this was the first time the White House said that the president and his chief of staff called to give one strong support.

Pruitt dismissed the townhouse controversy, explaining that he rented just one room while he looked for permanent housing. The EPA's general counsel issued a reporting calling the rent for one room, about $1,500 a month, "reasonable."

Pruitt said, "I'm dumbfounded that that's controversial." He added that the lobbyist friend from Oklahoma doesn't have business before the EPA.

"When you think of the townhouse, the rent last year. The owner of that is an Oklahoman. I've known him for years. He's the outside counsel for the National Rifle Association, has no clients that are before this agency, nor does his wife have any clients that have appeared before this agency. I've had ethics counsel here at the agency, the office of general counsel and ethics officials review the lease. They've actually looked at the lease. Most of the people who are criticizing me haven't. If you look at the lease it's very clear it's market value," said Pruitt, formerly Oklahoma attorney general.

"You know, I was living out of a suitcase for the first four or five months I was here. My wife was not here. My children were not here. My wife was back at home in Oklahoma until my kid went to college and my child went to law school. So we were actively trying to find a place to live and I was literally living out of a suitcase," he explained of his life in the townhouse where he shared common areas.

Pruitt isn't giving in to the critics. In fact he said he plans to "lean in" and fight harder.

A college baseball player who went on to own an AAA farm team for the Los Angeles Dodgers, he used a sport analogy to call his next play.

"We're leaning in. When a pitcher throws to you inside and tries to knock you off the plate, you get back in the box and get up close to the plate and dare him to throw it inside so you can pull it and knock it out of the park," said Pruitt.

"Look, the goal here is to focus on getting results and as the noise happens...getting the job done," he added.

Fox News
http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/04/04/epas-scott-pruitt-pushes-back-on-pay-raise-condo-controversy-in-fox-exclusive.html
EPA's Scott Pruitt pushes back on pay raise, condo controversy in Fox exclusive
By Barnini Chakraborty, 4/4/18

**embedded video*

Embattled Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt fired back at critics Wednesday, defending his decision to take a $50 a day condo rental from the wife of a lobbyist and claiming he just found out about a controversial pay raise for two of his staff members.

"My staff and I found out about it yesterday and I changed it," Pruitt told Fox News in an exclusive wide-ranging interview.

When pressed to provide specifics, Pruitt said he wasn't sure who would be held accountable or if the person who authorized the raise was a career EPA employee or a political appointee.

"You don't know? You run the agency. You don't know who did it?" Fox News' Ed Henry asked.

"I found out this yesterday and I corrected the action and we are in the process of finding out how it took place and correcting it," Pruitt responded, though he didn't say if anyone would be fired.

In March, Pruitt approached the White House and asked for substantial pay raises for two of his closest aides, Sarah Greenwalt and Millan Hupp. Pruitt asked to bump Greenwalt's salary to $164,200 from $107,435 and Hupp's to $114,590 from $86,460. Since the employees were political appointees, the White House needed to sign off on it but refused.

According to The Atlantic, someone at the EPA used a little-known provision in the Safe Drinking Water Act to skirt around the White House's decision and green light Greenwalt and Hupp's salary increases.

"So, hang on. Both of these staffers who got these large pay raises are friends of yours. I believe from Oklahoma right?" Henry asked.

Pruitt responded, "They are staffers here in the agency."

"They are friends of yours," Henry said.

"Well, they serve a very important purpose," Pruitt replied.

"And you did not know that they got these large pay raises?" Henry pressed.

Pruitt responded, "I did not know that they got pay raises until yesterday."

Pruitt has also come under fire for leasing a Capitol Hill condo that was tied to a prominent fossil-fuels lobbyist for $50 a night. Though an agency ethics official said the condo deal didn't violate federal ethics rules, it has raised eyebrows about Pruitt.

Pruitt told Fox he rented the condo from a fellow Oklahoman and that everything was above board.

"This was like an Airbnb situation," Pruitt said of his home located a block from the U.S. Capitol. "When I was not there, the landlord, they had access to the entirety of the facility. When I was there, I only had access to a room."

Pruitt also faced growing questions about his frequent first-class travel that has led to media scrutiny and speculation about his job security.

Pruitt has spent between $2,000 and $2,600 on first-class flights back to Oklahoma. He also dropped $1,400 to $4,000 on flights to New York, Boston and Texas, according to a report

Pruitt told Fox News that he blames the left and says they are out to get him.

On Tuesday, Pruitt made headlines after laying out plans 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.

His decision to rewrite the nation's first carbon limits on automobiles reflects both the power of the country's automakers and the Trump administration's determination to jump start the car industry.

The move also 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 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.

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/while-media-fixate-on-scott-pruitts-living-arrangements-his-epa-reforms-are-praiseworthy
While media fixate on Scott Pruitt's living arrangements, his EPA reforms are praiseworthy (*Op-Ed)
By Kevin Mooney, 4/3/18, 1:09 PM

President Trump's EPA appears poised to liberate American consumers from Obama-era vehicle regulations rooted in misguided climate change policies.

On Monday, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in a press release that the greenhouse gas emissions standards for cars and light trucks for the model years 2022-2025 should be revised based on updated data. Pruitt also announced the beginning of a "joint process" with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that will result in "more appropriate" standards for greenhouse gas emissions and Corporate Average Fuel Economy regulations, widely known as CAFE standards, that impose restrictions on the size of vehicles.

Pruitt announced his agency's regulatory reforms upon completion of the Midterm Evaluation process for the greenhouse gas emissions standards for cars and light trucks, a process which the Obama administration "short-circuited" just days before leaving office, according to the release.

"The Obama Administration's determination was wrong," Pruitt said in the release. "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."

He added:

> 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. 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.

Pruitt's actions have earned him praise from the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank devoted to free enterprise and individual liberty.

"CAFE's lethal effects on vehicle crashworthiness were documented by analysts and a federal appeals court years ago," Sam Kazman, CEI's general counsel said in a news release. "Despite this, CAFE has remained in force, getting even more stringent and more deadly over the years. We hope that the Trump Administration will finally take account of those effects and start to liberalize this program."

Myron Ebell, who is the director of CEI's Center for Energy and Environment, said American consumers stand to benefit from the announced reforms in terms of vehicular safety, performance, size and fuel economy.

"This is the first step in many years toward reducing government control over what kinds of cars people can choose to buy," he said.

The restrictions that were previously imposed under the guise of fuel efficiency rest on a faulty premise, Marlo Lewis, a senior fellow with CEI explained in the press release.

"Fuel economy mandates restrict consumer choice, add thousands of dollars to the cost of new vehicles, and limit vehicle safety," he said. "Contrary to the program's original rationale, the world is not running out of oil. And even if you worry about global warming, fuel efficiency standards are a stupendously inefficient climate change mitigation strategy. Congress should end the reign of bureaucrats and put consumers back in charge of telling automakers what kinds of cars and trucks to produce."

Pruitt has come under fire recently for his living arrangements in Washington, D.C. ABC News has reported that Pruitt spent his first several months in Washington living in a condo partially owned by the wife of an energy firm lobbyist and reportedly only paid $50 a night for the condo, which is located in close proximity to Capitol Hill. Former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has suggested that Pruitt may not keep his position as a result of the revelations.

But, at the same time, Pruitt's efforts to alleviate the regulatory burden on average Americans while working to restore sound scientific practices within the EPA arguably rank among the Trump administration's most significant policy achievements.

EPA officials quoted in the press have said Pruitt's living arrangements did not violate ethics rules. Even if there is no technical violation, appearances matter in Washington. That's especially true for someone who has been remarkably effective up until now in advancing the Trump administration's efforts to free the economy from centralized planning in Washington.

RedState

https://www.redstate.com/streiff/2018/04/04/people-supposed-conservative-trying-torpedo-scott-pruitt/

Why Are People Who Are Supposed To Be Conservative Trying To Torpedo Scott Pruitt?

By Streiff, 4/4/18, 2:12 PM

Right now there is a concerted campaign underway by the left and the NeverTrump right to take down EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. Over the past few weeks there has been a drumbeat of "scandals." Pruitt flies business class (less often than his predecessor, Lisa Jackson or Gina McCarthy, but you can't mention that because of "whataboutism" and because of hundreds of death threats he's recieved), there was a "sweetheart deal" on a room in a DC townhouse ($1500/month isn't all that much of a deal for a room and it was cleared by EPA ethics, but that doesn't count) and an utter nothingburger about Pruitt using a completely legal route to get a couple of aides promotions.

For instance, this is what we know about McCarthy's travel:

'As the media continue to criticize Pruitt and his 'luxury' international travel, his expenses are nothing out of the ordinary – or even lower – compared to previous EPA directors under the Obama administration, who avoided the criticism. "The double standard couldn't be more clear: Under Barack Obama's EPA the media chose not to report on expenditures to protect the EPA administrator for international travel or the costs of their trips,' Jahan Wilcox, an EPA spokesman, told the Washington Free Beacon. 'But under the Trump administration the costs to protect our government officials is somehow scandalous.' Lisa Jackson, who was Obama's EPA director between 2009 and 2013, spent more than $332,000 on airfare and security for four international trips, on average $83,000 per trip, according to documents obtained by the Washington Free Beacon. She spent $64,963 for trips to Tel Aviv; $59,950 to Rio de Janeiro; $51,436 to Montreal; and $155,764 to Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. Gina McCarthy, the agency's director between 2013 and 2017, embarked on 10 international trips, spending nearly $630,000 on airfare and security, on average $63,000 per trip. The documents revealed costs for McCarthy's journeys to Ghana ($68,382), Peru ($45,140), Tokyo ($74,738), Paris ($41,321), Dubai ($90,368), Tokyo ($67,703), Florence ($56,193), Vancouver ($62,247), Vietnam ($68,268), and Beijing ($55,385)."

Mollie Hemingway at The Federalist has the scoop:

After Donald Trump, the individual in DC with the biggest target on his back is Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt. When he was attorney general of Oklahoma, he sued the EPA more than a dozen times to get the powerful regulatory agency to stay within its legal authority. His nomination was deeply concerning to radical environmentalists inside and outside the media. As a result, he and his team have been under a microscope since even before his confirmation in early 2017.

Well-funded environmental groups, many with former EPA staffers, deluge the agency with FOIA requests to catch someone in a scandal. Unlike how they covered Obama-era EPA administrators, media outlets constantly request information about everything Pruitt does, from his schedule to his travel particulars. Whipped-up partisans have made unprecedented numbers of death threats against him and his family. Powerful liberals opine against him.

Some suggest the death threats are understandable. Liberal Republican governors of New Jersey despise the man. Thomas Kean was calling on him to resign a year ago. Christine Todd Whitman gave inappropriately unserious comments about the death threats. Chris Christie did George Stephanopolous' bidding by trying to throw Pruitt under the bus this past weekend. Maybe there is something in the water of Jersey.

The Weekly Standard's Bill Kristol, who this week tweeted his desire for Michelle Obama to run and defeat Donald Trump, said Pruitt was a parody of sycophancy for supporting a conservative deregulatory agenda. He also thrice tweeted his excitementover the possibility of leftists ousting Pruitt. Fellow NeverTrump enthusiast and Washington Post in-house conservative (really!) Jennifer Rubin also expressed giddiness about him possibly being fired.

Pruitt is a guy we should all be lining up to defend. Under Pruitt, the EPA accepted responsibility for the disastrous spill it created at the Gold King mine in Colorado. And he committed substantial resources to the clean-up. He's prioritized the clean-up of Super Fund sites that have lingered for decades. He has taken fire and sword to the onerous regulatory strait

jacket the Obama administration tried to impose on the US economy. Pruitt had begun the repeal of Obama's Clean Power Plan coal regs and the Obama-era Clean Power Plan. Under Pruitt, an executive order was issued to rescind the EPA's overreaching Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule that often allowed the EPA to claim jurisdiction over literal mudholes.

Three years after the lead-in-water crisis in Flint, MI, the EPA, under Pruitt acted.

This week, Pruitt acted to revise the absurd fuel efficiency standards established by the Obama administration.

And let's not forget his key role in moving the Dakota Access Pipeline to completion.

And, yes, Pruitt had destroyed morale at the EPA. Under Pruitt they are punished for watching porn at work and the US government no longer pays for health club memberships. But life is tough and we all have to make sacrifices.

This is just part of the ongoing strategy we see by the left and by Trump opponents on the right to attack solid conservatives doing a great job simply because they are serving in Trump's administration. I understand why the left wants the guy gone. But Scott Pruitt is actively dismantling the economy killing regulatory regime constructed over the years and I don't understand why anyone who claims to be any kind of Republican or conservative is going along with this sham...okay, I do understand but that doesn't make it less loathsome.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/381508-epa-chief-scott-pruitt-gets-results-thats-why-hes-a-target-of-the
EPA Chief Scott Pruitt gets results — that's why he's a target of the left (*Op-Ed)
By Rick Manning, 4/3/18, 6:30 PM

President Donald Trump is standing by his embattled Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt, according to reports. Let's be clear, that is good thing for both Trump and the country. Pruitt is one of the shining stars of the Trump administration, and no one who supports the president's "Make America Great Again" agenda should want him replaced.

Current complaints about Pruitt's Washington, D.C., condo, rented at the fair-market value from a lobbyist, are mostly politically motivated. As the designated agency ethics official for the EPA explained:

"Entering into the lease was consistent with federal ethics regulations regarding gifts, and use of the property in accordance with the lease agreement did not constitute a gift as defined in those regulations."

Yet some hope that by attacking Pruitt on fake ethics charges, the media-created scandal will cause the Trump White House to either foolishly force Pruitt out or cause him to throw up his hands in disgust and resign.

This would be a disaster for President Trump and all of us who care about his success.

EPA Administrator Pruitt has been instrumental in taking on the difficult task of rolling back Obama era regulations and in his first year has already completed 22 deregulatory actions, saving more than a billion dollars in regulatory costs.

Something as benign as Pruitt's recently announced effort to make certain that the methodology of the science the EPA uses to make regulatory determinations is transparent and the results are repeatable, has come under fire from former Obama-era EPA administrators Gina McCarthy and Janet McCabe called it, "his latest effort to cripple the agency."

It would seem that making sure the science behind major economy-shattering regulations is actually accurate and that the data is available for public scrutiny should be standard. Yet, incredibly, Pruitt is having to fight for the sake of establishing sound science that meets the basic criteria of the scientific method in order to restore valid underpinnings for environmental regulations.

Pruitt is even having to re-evaluate the Obama administration's controversial and arbitrary fuel efficiency standard that set a car and light truck fleet average of 50 miles per gallon by 2025, regardless of whether it was technologically possible to achieve it. Effectively, this policy would force auto makers to sell expensive-to-produce electric vehicles to consumers at a loss in order to be able to sell customers the trucks and other gasoline-consuming vehicles that they want at significantly increased prices.

The changes announced by the EPA have left open what the fuel efficiency standards will be, and likely will end the state of California's waiver to federal law allowing the rogue state to compel stricter standards under the Clean Air Act.

President Trump can expect to hear an uproar from states like California and New York over Pruitt's smart decision on Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, but when Administrator Pruitt prevails on this issue, it will help the president achieve his goal of putting the American auto industry back on top. Pruitt is doing the hard work to achieve the Trump agenda and taking the political and personal attacks that are part of battling the environmental industry driving American manufacturing to the breaking point.

We are talking about more than angry letter writing. In fact, Pruitt and his family have been subjected to a significant stream of personal threats. The threats have become so severe that the EPA inspector general, who is tasked with the physical safety of the administrator, now provides 24/7 protection for him and his family.

Incredibly, Pruitt gets zero credit from the left for increasing Superfund clean-up efforts designed to restore polluted sites to usability. He gets zero credit for enforcement actions that resulted in the second highest level of civil and administrative fine collections in the past decade, falling short of only FY 2016 which included a massive BP settlement. He gets zero credit because these critics are less concerned with cleaning up legitimate messes, than strangling the American manufacturing sector today and into the future.

President Donald Trump can and should be proud of his administrator's efforts at the EPA. Scott Pruitt is moving the Trump agenda forward and ensuring that the environment remains protected while our economic engines roar back to life.

Scott Pruitt is excelling at his job, and that is why he is the target of those who want to see the Trump administration fail. The president needs to recognize this and continue to stand by his chief general in the war against the regulatory stranglehold that was left by Obama. To be persuaded to make a personnel change at the EPA would be a disastrous mistake for his policy agenda. Most importantly, it would be a bad, bad decision for America's future.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/381528-president-tells-embattled-epa-chief-to-stay-strong
President tells embattled EPA chief to stay strong
By Timothy Cama and Miranda Green, 4/3/18, 8:03 PM

President Trump offered a show of support on Tuesday for embattled Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt, who is facing calls to step down following a series of controversies related to his travel, staff and accommodations in Washington.

Trump called Pruitt on Monday night, the White House said, telling him to "keep your head up," "keep fighting," and that "we have your back."

White House chief of staff John Kelly gave Pruitt a similar call Tuesday, according to reports.

"I hope he's going to be great," Trump told reporters later in response to a question about Pruitt as media were being escorted out of a White House meeting.

Two GOP lawmakers said Tuesday that Pruitt should resign following reports he rented a two-bedroom condo on Capitol Hill for $50 each night he slept there. Pruitt's daughter also lived for a period of time in the condo, which was owned by the wife of a prominent energy lobbyist.

"When scandals and distractions overtake a public servant's ability to function effectively, another person should fill that role," Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) said in a statement calling for Pruitt to step down.

Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-Fla.) also said Pruitt should resign, tweeting Tuesday afternoon that 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," he added.

Curbelo and the retiring Ros-Lehtinen both represent districts won in the last presidential race by Hillary Clinton, and have repeatedly battled with Trump on a number of issues, making their breaks with the administration over Pruitt unsurprising.

At the same time, their decisions to publicly call for Pruitt to resign ensure more GOP lawmakers around the country will be asked if it is time for the EPA administrator to resign.

Pruitt has been dealing with a flurry of damaging news reports.

On Monday, The Washington Post reported that the EPA considered leasing a private jet for Pruitt for $100,000 a month.

The Atlantic published a report Tuesday that said Pruitt gave two staffers raises after the White House rejected the request, and the Post later found that one of those staffers helped Pruitt search for apartments.

During his call to Pruitt, Trump steered clear of the controversies, only touching on the regulatory work the administrator is doing, The Associated Press reported Tuesday.

Kelly, on the other hand, warned Pruitt the White House is displeased with the recent news dump.

Trump has shown little patience for Cabinet members and other staff who attract negative headlines.

He recently pushed out Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin and national security adviser H.R. McMaster. Economic adviser Gary Cohn also left the White House.

Democrats are upping the pressure on Pruitt. On Tuesday, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.) and Reps. Don Beyer (Va.) and Ted Lieu (Calif.) called for the EPA's inspector general to investigate the circumstances surrounding Pruitt's condo rental.

Beyer and Lieu wrote that Pruitt's rental cost "is far below market value and, as such, would constitute an impermissible gift under federal regulations."

They warned that if the low prices were set by the wife of the lobbyist "with the intent to curry favor with him on an issue important to" their interests, that it could be illegal.

A spokeswoman for Inspector General Arthur Elkins said the office had received the lawmakers' requests and would consider them.

A source with knowledge of the EPA's operation, howver, said Pruitt was only likely to find himself in real hot water with the president if the media narrative distracted from his regulatory reform effort — something the source said Pruitt is well aware of.

So long as the news of his personal travel or rental agreements doesn't overshadow the EPA's policy decisions — like its Monday announcement to roll back car emission standards — the president wouldn't have cause for concern, the source said.

Pruitt's supporters in conservative circles are also standing by him because of his aggressive work to undo the Obama administration's environmental agenda.

"These stories are obviously a distraction, and I hope he can work through them," said Myron Ebell, head of the energy and environment program at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. "The president causes enough problems with the administration with things that he gets into. So far [Pruitt's] doing a great job and I think these are fairly minor issues."

Nick Loris, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, said Pruitt will likely stick through.

"I personally think that he can weather this storm, given that he's proven to work hard on accomplishing many of the regulatory rollbacks that the president wants," he said.

"In terms of keeping the conservative, free-market base happy and keeping businesses and families across the country happy with what many have deemed burdensome regulations, the administrator has done what he wanted to do in his previous role as attorney general, and accomplish it in this new role."

Pruitt has shown no signs that the scandals are changing his aggressive deregulatory agenda.

He hosted automaker and dealer representatives at the EPA on Tuesday, shortly after the White House revealed the calls from Trump and Kelly, to celebrate his decision to kick off the process of easing auto emissions rules.

"We will get this right going forward, this year," said Pruitt, who criticized the previous standards set by the Obama administration.

"I think the focus in the past has been on making manufacturers in Detroit, making manufacturers in various parts of the country, make cars that people aren't going to buy. And our focus should be on making cars that people purchase actually more efficient," he said.

Pruitt held the event at EPA's Washington headquarters, surrounded by automaker and dealer representatives and conservative advocates.

EPA officials allowed reporters from a handful of outlets to attend, but prohibited others, including The Hill. Video from the event shows Pruitt did not take any questions.

AP
https://apnews.com/dec44f0919104b6eb701fcb8532d9dd1/EPA-chief-gets-support-from-Trump,-warning-from-White-House
EPA chief gets support from Trump, warning from White House
By Zeke Miller and Michael Biesecker, 4/4/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump offered a measured gesture of support for Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Scott Pruitt, but those words of encouragement also came with a White House warning about the ethical questions surrounding his travel spending and ties to Washington lobbyists.

"I hope he's going to be great," Trump told reporters Tuesday, declining to reiterate publicly his private praise for Pruitt's work.

In a phone call Monday, Trump told the EPA chief that "we've got your back" and urged him to "keep his head up" and "keep fighting," according to two administration officials. Trump's call was quickly followed by one from chief of staff John Kelly, who laid out the White House's displeasure over being caught blindsided by some of the ethical problems raised, according to two other officials.

Those officials said the praise referred to Pruitt's work in loosening environmental regulations and his success at getting under the skin of environmental groups. But they added that the tone of Trump's call was not entirely positive.

All of the officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss private conversations publicly.

Trump has repeatedly praised endangered members of his administration while privately plotting their ouster and interviewing replacements. That tendency, and Trump's tepid words Tuesday, suggested that Pruitt's future at EPA is not assured despite the president's apparently high regard for him over the past year.

Pruitt has come under intense scrutiny for his use of a Capitol Hill condominium owned by the wife of prominent Washington lobbyist Steven Hart, 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 condo, 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. Under the lease, Pruitt technically rented only one of the condo's two bedrooms, but his daughter stayed in the second room from May to August.

Records show that while Pruitt was living in the condo, he met in his EPA office with a lobbyist from Hart's firm and two executives from an energy company seeking to scuttle tighter pollution standards for coal-fired power plants. EPA also granted a favorable ruling to a pipeline company also represented by Hart's firm.

On Tuesday, The Atlantic reported that Pruitt had also bypassed the White House to give big raises to two young aides he had brought with him to EPA from Oklahoma. After failing to win approval from the West Wing, Pruitt used a little-known legal maneuver to push the pay increases through. A 30-year-old lawyer serving as Pruitt's senior legal counsel got a 53 percent raise, boosting her salary to more than $164,000. Pruitt's 26-year-old scheduling director got a 33 percent raise, increasing her salary to nearly $115,000.

Two Republicans representing left-leaning South Florida districts, Reps. Carlos Curbelo and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, joined Democrats and environmental groups on Tuesday in calling on Pruitt to resign or be fired.

In a tweet, Curbelo said Pruitt's "corruption scandals are an embarrassment to the Administration, and his conduct is grossly disrespectful to American taxpayers."

Democrats from both the House and Senate issued letters Tuesday urging the EPA's inspector general to investigate Pruitt's living arrangements. Spokeswoman Jennifer Kaplan said the watchdog office is evaluating the requests. It is already probing Pruitt's outsized 2017 travel spending, which included extensive use of bodyguards and frequent use of 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 because of 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 roll back regulations and fight environmental groups.

The president's call to Pruitt came just days after another Cabinet official, Veterans Affairs head David Shulkin, was dismissed after stirring ethics concerns. An inspector general's report concluded that Shulkin had inappropriately accepted Wimbledon tickets and his staff had doctored an email to improperly justify free travel for his wife. Shulkin denied any wrongdoing.

Other Trump Cabinet members, including Housing Secretary Ben Carson and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, have also faced questions about their expenditures. Last year, Trump's first Health and Human Services secretary, Tom Price, was forced to resign over his private air travel on the government's dime.

New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/climate/pruitt-epa-apartment-emissions.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FEnvironmental%20Protection%20Agency&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection
For Scott Pruitt, a Spotlight Shines on His Ethics, Not His E.P.A. Rollbacks
By Coral Davenport, 4/3/18

WASHINGTON — It should have been Scott Pruitt's finest moment.

Mr. Pruitt, the chief of the Environmental Protection Agency, has sought to make his name as the Trump administration's most effective eraser of regulations on American industry. On Tuesday, he formally announced his most sweeping regulatory rollback to date: a plan to weaken President Barack Obama's stringent rules on planet-warming tailpipe emissions.

Mr. Pruitt's proposal is designed to unravel a signature piece of Mr. Obama's environmental legacy, hand a victory to the American automakers and please his boss, President Trump. But instead of basking in glory, Mr. Pruitt is caught up in a swirl of allegations of impropriety — most recently centered on the fact that last year he rented a room in Washington from the wife of a prominent lobbyist.

Mr. Pruitt unveiled his rollback in a hastily announced presentation at E.P.A. headquarters after canceling a plan to speak at a suburban Virginia auto dealership, a more public setting that might have exposed him to questions about the lease arrangement, or about his first-class air travel at taxpayer expense over the past year, for which he has also faced criticism. Mr. Pruitt declined to field questions at the event.

Late Monday, Mr. Trump phoned Mr. Pruitt to reassure him that his job was safe. "Keep your head up, keep fighting, we got your back," Mr. Trump told Mr. Pruitt, according to an administration official. Then on Tuesday morning, John F. Kelly, the White House chief of staff, called Mr. Pruitt to reaffirm the president's sentiment, the official said.

Despite the president's encouraging language in the call, the depth of Mr. Trump's support can be difficult to gauge. He dislikes direct confrontation and has been known to pivot from chummy chatter with an associate, in private, to an abrupt firing.

That was the case last week with David J. Shulkin, the secretary of veterans affairs, who was fired by Mr. Kelly just hours after having what Mr. Shulkin described as a low-key phone conversation with the president about the progress he was making at the department, during which Mr. Trump said nothing of his impending ouster.

On Tuesday morning, Senate Democrats sent a letter to the E.P.A.'s inspector general asking him to open an investigation into Mr. Pruitt's housing arrangements in 2017.

Mr. Pruitt came under fire last week after reports about his rental last year of a Washington residence partly owned by the wife of a top energy lobbyist whose firm, according to disclosure forms, conducted business before the E.P.A. that same year. Under terms of the lease, he paid $50 a night to stay in a condominium in the pricey Capitol Hill neighborhood.

An E.P.A. spokesman on Tuesday said the lease arrangement was consistent with federal ethics regulations.

Mr. Pruitt earlier this year was reprimanded by the White House after documents emerged showing that he had spent more than $107,000 in public money on first-class air travel.

A Republican member of Congress took the unusual step of calling for Mr. Pruitt's removal on Tuesday. Representative Carlos Curbelo of Florida wrote on Twitter, "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."

Mr. Curbelo is a co-chairman of the House Climate Solutions Caucus, a bipartisan group that has called for efforts to address global warming.

Mr. Trump on Tuesday afternoon made a brief comment when asked about Mr. Pruitt in the Cabinet Room, after The Atlantic magazine reported that Mr. Pruitt gave raises to two aides even though the White House had declined to approve the raises. "I hope he's going to be great," Mr. Trump said of the E.P.A. administrator.

The E.P.A. spokesman said that Mr. Pruitt had not been aware that the personnel actions had not been submitted to the Presidential Personnel Office and had directed them to be submitted for review. The spokesman, Jahan Wilcox, also said that the agency had "clear authority" to make staff appointments.

Chris Christie, the former New Jersey governor who himself has come under fire for ethics issues, including his handling of a bridge lane-closing scandal, said on Sunday that Mr. Pruitt's actions were likely to cost him his job. "The president's been ill served by this," Mr. Christie said on ABC's "This Week." When asked if Mr. Pruitt should resign, he replied, "I don't know how you survive this one."

Mr. Trump has sought to build a legacy of rolling back regulations on American industry, and Mr. Pruitt has proved to be one of his most effective lieutenants. In his first year on the job, Mr. Pruitt initiated the rollbacks of more than two dozen major environmental rules.

The proposed rollback on vehicle mileage and emissions standards that he announced Tuesday is arguably the largest of those. Last year, soon after Mr. Trump's inauguration, the nation's biggest automakers asked the president to loosen an Obama-era rule that would have forced automakers to build cars that achieve an average fuel economy of 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025, nearly doubling their mileage while also reducing a major source of greenhouse gas pollution.

At Mr. Trump's request, Mr. Pruitt declared the auto regulation too onerous on industry and filed a legal document to reconsider it with the expectation of filing a new, weaker rule later this year.

Initially, Mr. Pruitt's announcement was to take place Tuesday at a Chevrolet dealership in Chantilly, Va., owned by Geoffrey Pohanka, who has spoken out against climate science and against tougher automotive standards. But while Mr. Pohanka was eager to offer his dealership as a stage for the announcement, other Chevrolet dealers were uneasy about seeing the Chevy brand used as a backdrop to Mr. Pruitt's announcement, according to two dealers who spoke on condition of anonymity, citing their relationship with the automaker.

Late Monday, the dealership said the event had been canceled. Instead, the Tuesday morning event was held at the E.P.A. headquarters, attended by a handful of auto industry lobbyists. The E.P.A. invited only a small handful of reporters to attend.

"This is another step in the president's deregulatory agenda," Mr. Pruitt said, standing next to a row of signs that said "jobs" and "certainty." "We are going to make sure that consumers across this country are not put in a position where they're having to buy more expensive cars, cars that don't really truly want to be purchased."

Afterward, when asked about the ethics questions facing his tenure, Mr. Pruitt turned and left the room, flanked by members of his security detail.

Some Republicans believe the E.P.A. chief's efforts to roll back regulations will keep him in Mr. Trump's good graces. "So far, his reforms are estimated to save taxpayers over $1 billion in deregulatory savings," Senator James M. Inhofe, Mr. Pruitt's fellow Oklahoma Republican, a senior member of the Senate environment committee and a longtime supporter of Mr. Pruitt's, wrote in a statement. "He's been an effective member of the president's team and I look forward to continuing to work with him to restore the E.P.A. to its proper size and scope," Mr. Inhofe wrote.

Conservative supporters said they believed it would take more than the apartment and travel scrutiny to bring down Mr. Pruitt. Myron Ebell, who led the Trump administration's E.P.A. transition team, said he thought that as long as Mr. Pruitt pursued Mr. Trump's agenda his job would be safe.

Mr. Trump is "giving us a number of surprises, and one surprise could be that he stands by Pruitt," Mr. Ebell said.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/pruitt-dumbfounded-rental-from-lobbyist-is-controverisal-943597
Pruitt 'dumbfounded' rental from lobbyist is controversial
By Alex Guillen, 4/3/18, 7:47 PM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt today for the first time personally defended the $50-a-night room he rented from a lobbyist last year, calling the controversy yet another attack from critics who will "resort to anything" to stop his deregulatory agenda.

"I'm dumbfounded that that's controversial," Pruitt said of the Capitol Hill rental in an interview with the Washington Examiner, while criticizing the Beltway's "toxic" atmosphere.

"When you think of the townhouse, the rent last year. The owner of that is an Oklahoman. I've known him for years," said Pruitt, a former Oklahoma attorney general. "He's the outside counsel for the National Rifle Association, has no clients that are before this agency, nor does his wife have any clients that have appeared before this agency."

The co-owner of the property, Vicki Hart, is a health care lobbyist. Her husband, J. Steven Hart, is chairman of the lobbying group Williams & Jensen. His clients include natural gas exporter Cheniere and the American Automotive Policy Council.

Pruitt also pointed to a memo issued Friday by an EPA ethics official that deemed Pruitt's lease agreement to be market rate, a determination that has come under fire from critics who note the favorable terms with low rates in a tony neighborhood just blocks from the Capitol.

"I've had ethics counsel here at the agency, the office of general counsel and ethics officials review the lease. They've actually looked at the lease. Most of the people who are criticizing me haven't. If you look at the lease it's very clear it's market value," said Pruitt.

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/03/conservatives-hard-time-ditching-scott-pruitt/
Conservatives Will Have A Hard Time Ditching Scott Pruitt
By Saagar Enjeti, 4/3/18, 10:14 PM

Conservative lawmakers and the White House will face significant challenges if Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator Scott Pruitt is fired.

Pruitt landed himself in hot water after a flurry of coverage focused on his consistent purchasing of first class airfare tickets on the public dime, possibly violating federal gifting laws by paying low market rent to an energy lobbyist while in Washington D.C. and giving two of his staffers pay raises despite the objections of the White House.

The stories prompted some White House officials to say anonymously Monday that Pruitt may be on his way out the door. However, President Donald Trump reportedly called him to express support amid the public relations storm Monday night. White House chief of staff John Kelly also spoke with Pruitt Tuesday morning, the White House confirmed.

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

"The president likes him and likes what he's doing," an administration official familiar with Pruitt and Trump's relationship told The Daily Caller. Pruitt has been especially successful in enacting regulatory rollback at the EPA that has won widespread praise from conservative activists.

Activists pointed to Pruitt's repeal of Obama-era regulations on clean coal, coal powered plants, water usage rules, standards for automakers, mining rules and cleaning up superfund sites. The administrator also ended the use of "secret science" mandating that data used to justify rules and regulations must be publicly available.

Beyond ideological considerations is a major procedural roadblock. A longtime Capitol Hill leadership veteran told TheDC "it would be almost impossible to imagine the Senate confirming any other administrator at this point."

The Capitol Hill veteran said that Pruitt is extremely well-liked by Republican senators who appreciate his responsiveness to their queries and their satisfaction with his ability to overturn Obama-era regulations so quickly.

Senators also must consider the pending nominations of three new Trump appointees: Admiral Ronny Jackson to be the next secretary of Veterans Affairs, Mike Pompeo as secretary of state and Gina Haspel as CIA director.

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/epas-scott-pruitt-lives-to-fight-another-day

EPA's Scott Pruitt lives to fight another day
By John Siciliano, 4/4/18, 12:46 PM

Scott Pruitt is still standing, a day after a flurry of bad headlines hit the Environmental Protection Agency chief.

Lobbyists, donors to President Trump and conservative advisers tell the Washington Examiner the decision on whether he stays, or goes, will come down to Trump himself. And the president really likes having Pruitt around.

"I don't doubt there are people inside EPA or the White House that don't like Pruitt. But the president likes Pruitt, they are very similar in many ways," said one industry lobbyist.

Pruitt has been effective in carrying out Trump's deregulation agenda. From the Paris climate deal exit to this week's auto emissions rollback, "he has been effective all along," the industry source said.

Plus, "he looks like a victim of the 'fake media,'" which Trump likes the most, and the recent stories of taking a sweetheart deal from lobbyists to live in a condominium only creates "more background" that Pruitt has opponents who want to take him down.

The source also says the condominium deal is being overblown as an ethics issue, when it is really a "judgment call." It is just noise that Trump probably believes Pruitt can get through, the source says.

Dan Eberhart, a Trump donor and oil services magnate, said the condo issue is troubling but Pruitt can overcome it.

"Administrator Pruitt's short-term housing arrangements seem misguided given the fishbowl of D.C., but I don't see it as unethical or some ill-gotten financial gain," Eberhart said in an email. "Overall, I think Pruitt has been a tireless advocate of Trump's philosophy of rolling back unnecessary business-hampering regulations while balancing the EPA's mission to protect the environment. And he's accomplished this in an agency that is hostile to him even being in the building."

Mike McKenna, a conservative environmental adviser with close ties to the Trump transition team, said the stories likely stem from the White House itself. He believes lesser advisers have it out for Pruitt and are pushing the stories to the media to pressure him to resign.

"Obviously, what's going on is somebody at the White House has the knives out for the guy, but they must not have the president's ear, because they're running this thing through the press, not with the president," McKenna told the Washington Examiner. But until they have the president's ear, Pruitt will keep on doing his job, he said.

"The Pruitt crew is looking at this like 'we're going to keep our heads down and keep doing our thing,'" McKenna said. "As long as the boss is OK with it, it's OK."

White House officials tell the Washington Examiner that Pruitt is safe in his job for now.

A Republican close to the White House described Pruitt Tuesday as "more effective than any other Cabinet secretary, with [Attorney General] Jeff Sessions being the one possible exception."

But the same source said that neither Pruitt's track record nor Trump's phone call guarantees that "he'll still be around a week from now."

One senior administration official said Pruitt could survice while former Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and national security adviser H.R. McMaster couldn't because rumors about his job security have overshadowed news coverage of Trump's alleged affair with porn star Stormy Daniels.

"Obviously that won't last forever," the official warned.

Trump has offered cryptic comments about his EPA chief since their conversation Monday evening. "I hope he's going to be great," the president told reporters during a quadrilateral meeting Tuesday.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2018/04/04/scott-pruitt-is-bringing-back-memories-of-the-epas-most-controversial-leader-but-theres-a-key-difference/?utm_term=.177e02c3203a
The EPA once had a leader even more scandal-plagued than Pruitt. Here's how he's different
By Chris Mooney, 4/4/18, 10:58 AM

A brash new leader takes over the Environmental Protection Agency, pushing sharp budget cuts and a massive rollback of environmental rules.

But before long, the administrator is mired in a wave of controversy and scandal.

That's the story of EPA chief Scott Pruitt — but it is also the story of the late Anne Gorsuch Burford, who was the first EPA administrator under President Ronald Reagan. (She's also mother to Supreme Court Justice Neil M. Gorsuch.)

The parallels between Pruitt and Gorsuch have been noted from the beginning — and they're growing in ways Pruitt is unlikely to enjoy. Granted, crucial differences remain: The Gorsuch-era scandals were certainly more sweeping than anything we've seen so far. And although Gorsuch ultimately lost the support of Congress and the president who appointed her, Pruitt, for now, seems to mostly maintain both.

But Gorsuch and Pruitt are ideological outsiders who came to the agency looking to change it significantly, alienating career staff members and spurring controversy. Both were friends of industries angered by the EPA, and had opened doors to those industries once they were in office.

And as Pruitt's controversies have mounted — most recently involving a surprisingly cheap D.C. condo rental from a lobbyist whose husband, also a lobbyist, works in part on energy issues — so, too, has attention to whether Pruitt's term will end as Gorsuch's did.

She offered her resignation less than two years after taking office. Reagan, who picked Gorsurch for her hard-line stance on deregulation, then took the agency in a more moderate direction, tapping William Ruckelshaus, a centrist Republican, to try to repair the damage.

"Gorsuch was gone within about two years of her appointment. Pruitt's career is in the balance after, what, 12 to 13 months," said Terry Yosie, a former chief executive of the World Environment Center, who directed the EPA's Science Advisory Board under Gorsuch. "And I think there was a phase each one of them went through. Both became a distraction, then they became a lightning rod, then they became a liability."

Yet observers of both the Reagan administration and the current one say there are several reasons to think Pruitt may not share Gorsuch's fate.

One key difference is that in the early Reagan era, Democrats controlled the House and could use their investigative powers, including subpoenas, to pry information from Gorsuch and the EPA. They did so liberally.

"It played out over months of congressional hearings and testimony," said Christopher Sellers, an environmental historian at Stony Brook University. "A lot of the agency came from Congress, really. She was held in contempt of Congress for not coming in and testifying. The White House only turned against her after all this congressional pressure building over a long while."

Sellers sees this as very different from what's happening now with Pruitt, in that the controversies have reached an apparent peak so suddenly, as a result of media exposés, rather than playing out over the long course of a congressional investigation. Pruitt has not faced such a challenge, in part because of the Republican control of Congress.

And indeed, the controversies at Gorsuch's EPA stretched well beyond any one individual and led to multiple resignations in the end. There's no charge of anything similarly extensive under Pruitt.

Then there's another potential difference: Trump's confidence. Reagan appears to have made a calculation that he needed to tack to the political center on the environment later in his first term, and so replaced Gorsuch. But Trump seems more inclined to double down on deregulation, said Bernard Goldstein, who headed the EPA's Office of Research and Development under Ruckelshaus, and is now a professor emeritus of environmental health at the University of Pittsburgh.

"Reagan did exactly the same thing that Trump did in hiring Gorsuch," Goldstein said. "But somewhere in the middle of his first term, Reagan was faced with the issue that the environment was a particular problem for him, and he had to decide what to do about it, and he decided [that] the way to go was to get rid of Gorsuch and to bring in a more moderate liberal person."

And then, finally, there's the matter of whether people across the country care. Those who remember the Gorsuch era also recall that the scandals were central to the news and seemed to really shape public opinion and concern about the environment. That, in turn, forced a response from the Reagan administration.

It's far from clear that in the Trump era, with a far more fragmented media and a new story line every few hours, environment-related scandals hold our attention in the same way.

Gorsuch was a former state legislator from Colorado and a lawyer when she entered the Reagan administration. She came in to office as the head of a far younger and less complex Environmental Protection Agency — and quickly sought to slash agency budgets and to deregulate. In response, damaged morale at the agency led to a culture of leaking. (For one overview of the controversy that came to be known as "Sewergate," see here.)

Soon Gorsuch got into a conflict with Congress over potential corruption involving the $1.6 billion Superfund program, and with the backing of the White House, resisted a subpoena to provide information — leading to a contempt citation and a massive legal showdown between government branches once the White House invoked "executive privilege."

Congress, led by Democrats John Dingell of Michigan and Elliott Levitas of Georgia, fought back — and ultimately, as the saga dragged on, Gorsuch resigned, along with multiple EPA political appointees.

It's important to note that most of the scandals did not affect Gorsuch personally. Rather, her defiance of Congress was probably her most controversial act — but the controversy focused far more on her subordinates and the Superfund program, in particular.

"The only person who went to prison was Rita Lavelle, in charge of the Superfund program, but 21 people in the agency had to leave with the same brouhaha," Sellers said. "So we haven't really seen anything like the scale of turmoil and scandal within the agency."

Pruitt, also an outsider, comes from Oklahoma. One key difference, observers note, is that he's more politically and legally experienced, having served as the attorney general of a state, and far more targeted in how he has approached dismantling key programs at the EPA.

And, indeed, Pruitt has reversed a large number of Obama-era regulations, although the ultimate fate of many of these moves will be determined in courts.

Meanwhile, Pruitt's controversies are growing so numerous that they're beginning to undermine that image of deftness.

First it was things such as installing a soundproof phone booth in his office and having a high level of personal security; then it was pricey first-class flights.

But the story took a turn when it was revealed that he had been renting a condo in D.C.'s Capitol Hill neighborhood for just $50 a night, and only on nights when he stayed there — and that this deal was courtesy of Vicki and J. Steven Hart, a lobbyist couple. J. Steven Hart, who knew Pruitt from Oklahoma, works on energy issues as part of a wide portfolio of topics on which he lobbies. Vicki Hart is a health-care lobbyist.

Pruitt defended himself Tuesday, saying that "if you look at the lease, it's very clear it's market value. … You know, I was living out of a suitcase for the first four or five months I was here."

His fate now remains to be seen, with the White House surely evaluating the balance between Pruitt's deregulatory effectiveness on the one hand and his inability to stay out of the news on the other.

But already, among heads of the EPA, he seems to fit a category.

"If you think about Democrats and Republicans over the years, coming to EPA, the ones who were successful essentially worked with the career staff, and treated them as constituents, and brought them into their considerations and used their technical knowledge," said Richard Morgenstern, a former career EPA employee under Gorsuch, who later served in political positions at the agency in both Democratic and Republican administrations, and is now a senior fellow at Resources for the Future.

"And the two people who have led the agency who have not done that are Gorsuch and Pruitt."

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=.9ad6f9a4a61c
EPA's Scott Pruitt faces intensifying scrutiny, criticism of his ethics decisions
By Juliet Eilperin, Brady Dennis, and Josh Dawsey, 4/3/18, 8:26 PM

Scott Pruitt stepped to the lectern Tuesday in the Environmental Protection Agency's ornate Rachel Carson Room, flanked by signs reading "certainty" and "confidence." The words touted his rollback of Obama-era fuel efficiency standards, the latest move in Pruitt's campaign to implement President Trump's "deregulatory agenda."

But the message of the signs seemed out of step with Pruitt's current situation, as the EPA chief faces growing questions about a series of ethics decisions that have raised doubts about the job security of one of President Trump's most effective Cabinet members.

In recent weeks, Pruitt has been the focus of ongoing scrutiny of his frequent first-class travel, which the EPA has argued was necessary because of security concerns. He now is facing inquiries over a discount condo rental he arranged with the wife of an energy and transportation lobbyist, as well as his decision to utilize an obscure provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act to give huge raises to two staff members.

On Tuesday, two Republican lawmakers joined a chorus of Democrats and environmental groups calling for Pruitt's ouster. But Trump appeared to stand by his EPA chief, voicing support for a man who has also proven adept at delivering on the president's campaign promise to aggressively roll back environmental regulations.

"I hope he's going to be great," Trump replied, when asked by reporters whether he still supports Pruitt.

Monday night, according to senior administration officials, Trump had called and told him, "Keep your head up, keep fighting. We have your back."

Other Cabinet members have lost their jobs over controversies like Pruitt now faces, and history suggests that Trump's support for him could change any day. Some close to the president say Pruitt is unpopular among senior White House aides and many of Trump's friends. And Trump is closely attuned to news coverage — watching hours of it every day — and bad publicity has often soured him on a besieged staff member.

Senior Trump aides, including Chief of Staff John F. Kelly, have griped about Pruitt for several days, a senior White House official said late Tuesday. Kelly has told some colleagues he would like to see Pruitt gone, and the chief of staff has been annoyed by Pruitt floating his name to replace Attorney General Jeff Sessions. "But Trump isn't there yet," this person said.

At the EPA, according to several current and former top administration officials, the mood is growing darker. A few weeks ago, outside pundits were debating whether Trump would nominate Pruitt to replace Sessions; some now are speculating whether Pruitt will be forced to leave his current post.

The latest issue erupted Tuesday over Pruitt's use of the water law to give the two aides substantial salary increases.

Barely three years ago, Millan Hupp worked at an Embassy Suites hotel near the Nashville airport. She now makes $114,590 as a top deputy to Pruitt, running his scheduling and advance operation. Weeks ago she got a 33 percent raise.

The pay hike came after the 26-year-old staffer oversaw an extensive housing hunt for the administrator last year. Hupp at times conducted the search during office hours, according to a former EPA employee and others who interacted with her, activity that ethics experts said constitutes a violation of federal rules.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is facing scrutiny for a condo rental agreement linked to a fossil fuel lobbyist in D.C. (Reuters)

Rep. Betty McCollum (Minn.), the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, happened to live downstairs from Pruitt when he was renting the Capitol Hill condo — for which he paid $50 a night whenever he was in town. She faulted the administrator for operating under rules that would be untenable for an elected official.

"This is just corrupt," she said. "I have a salary. I pay for a place to stay. And it would be a sweetheart deal if I only had to pay my mortgage on the days I'm there."

Two moderate Republicans in Democratic-leaning House districts — Florida Reps. Carlos Curbelo and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen — called on Pruitt to step down. Curbelo tweeted that Pruitt's "corruption scandals are an embarrassment to the Administration, and his conduct is grossly disrespectful to American taxpayers."

Others came to his defense, including Sen. James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.), a longtime supporter.

"Administrator Pruitt has been instrumental in carrying out President Trump's deregulatory agenda at the EPA," Inhofe said in a statement. "I look forward to continuing to work with him to restore the EPA to its proper size and scope."

One of the latest controversies was the housing agreement he struck with the health care lobbyist Vicki Hart, whose husband, J. Steven Hart, is chief executive of Williams & Jensen. The law firm lobbies on various energy, transportation and trade issues.

The Harts donated to Pruitt's run for Oklahoma attorney general and held a fundraiser for him in 2014, according to public records.

"Vicki Hart purchased this property with the intention of eventually making it a residence for the Hart family," said Ryan Williams, a spokesman for the couple. "In the interim, the property is used primarily for entertainment and occasional gatherings."

EPA ethics officials hastily signed off on the unusual deal late last week after it became public, although they didn't have all the details when they made their ruling.

Steven Hart told The Washington Post last week that he "had no lobbying contact with EPA in 2017 or 2018" and referred to Pruitt as a "casual friend" with whom he has had little contact. But according to several people with knowledge of that condo arrangement, Hart also talked proudly about the rental agreement with Pruitt.

After Pruitt left the condo last summer, Hupp spearheaded Pruitt's subsequent moves. She contacted a local real estate firm to view properties for rent or sale, according to two individuals who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Separately, according to Capitol Hill resident Laurie Solnik, Hupp contacted her via the website Zillow to inquire about an $1,800-a-month English basement apartment that Solnik was renting.

Part of Hupp's search took place during office hours, according to these individuals. According to Don Fox, former acting director and general counsel for the Office of Government Ethics, it would amount to a violation of federal rules no matter when she worked on the project.

"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."

In a statement, EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox responded, "The notion that government resources were used to assist in finding housing is categorically false."

Solnik said Hupp arranged for a viewing on a Friday afternoon and conveyed only minutes before Pruitt's arrival that her boss was the prospective tenant. A member of the administrator's round-the-clock security detail came and mentioned the prospect of parking Pruitt's SUV in the back alley, she said.

Pruitt ultimately chose to live in the U Street area instead, then subsequently moved to an apartment on Capitol Hill where he now resides.

Hupp's work for Pruitt dates back to early 2015, when she started as deputy finance director during his days as Oklahoma attorney general, according to her online résumé and LinkedIn page. Her duties then included hunting for new donors and serving as "on-the-ground orchestrator of activity" for his 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. She solicited donations and scheduled his fundraising meetings and travel.

She declined to comment Tuesday.

The Atlantic first reported the raises for Hupp and EPA senior counsel Sarah Greenwalt, who also worked with him in Oklahoma. Greenwalt's salary jumped more than 52 percent, from $107,435 to $164,200.

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

E&E Greenwire
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060078167/search?keyword=EPA
Pruitt spread special hires throughout agency
By Kevin Bogardus and Ariel Wittenberg, 4/4/18

U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt used a unique hiring authority to bring on several political staffers, including top deputies in programs across the agency.

Documents obtained by E&E News under the Freedom of Information Act detail "administratively determined" hires under the Safe Drinking Water Act, showing that at one point last year, at least 20 officials were brought on under the hiring provision.

Several deputy assistant administrators — top political officials for EPA programs — like Nancy Beck, Patrick Davis, Dennis Lee Forsgren and Richard Yamada were listed once as administratively determined hires. Other close advisers to Pruitt were also in that category, including several associates and former aides of his when Pruitt was Oklahoma attorney general like Lincoln Ferguson, Millan Hupp, Sarah Greenwalt and Kenneth Wagner, according to records.

The hiring authority has been used at EPA by prior administrations. It can help an EPA chief fill out his or her staff quickly since administratively determined (AD) hires do not undergo the usual civil service hiring process. The agency can hire up to 30 employees in AD positions under the authority.

"The Safe Drinking Water Act provides the EPA with broad authority to appoint scientific, engineering, professional, legal and administrative positions within EPA without regard to the civil service laws," EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said. "This is clear authority that has been relied on by previous administrations."

Stan Meiburg, who spent 39 years at EPA, including as acting deputy administrator in the Obama administration, said, "It has been done by both parties, so it has been ratified over time. ... These are highly prized positions because you can bring people in without having to go through the usual competition process."

Meiburg remembered both the George W. Bush and Obama administrations having AD hires. He recalled some of those hires landing as political aides to EPA regional chiefs during those administrations. Meiburg said it made sense that the Trump administration would use the hiring authority for political aides like press officials and schedulers to assist Pruitt.

"Those are pretty specialized skills, and there are folks in the political field who have those skills," said Meiburg, who now teaches at Wake Forest University. "That's not to say you don't need a good solid career staff in public affairs, as well."

But Meiburg found it noteworthy that Pruitt had used the hiring authority to bring on deputy assistant administrators.

"The use of the AD authority to bring on a political deputy is a little unusual," Meiburg said. "Most of the AD appointments are at a lower level. You usually have a non-career SES be a political deputy."

Like lower-level political aides, the deputy assistant administrators don't require Senate confirmation. But assistant administrators, just above the deputies in rank, run EPA program offices and do need Senate approval.

The administratively determined hires have grabbed attention recently after The Atlantic reported yesterday that Pruitt used the hiring authority to give substantial pay raises to two officials against White House wishes. EPA has since alerted the White House.

EPA's Wilcox said in a statement, "The Administrator was not aware that these personnel actions had not been submitted to the Presidential Personnel Office. So, the Administrator has directed that they be submitted to the Presidential Personnel Office for review."

That move sparked scorn from Rep. Dan Kildee (D-Mich.), who represents Flint, still struggling with the aftermath of a drinking water crisis.

"EPA Administrator Pruitt's actions are shameful and an insult to the people of my hometown of Flint. Rather than hiring scientists, engineers and experts to work to solve drinking water contamination issues, Scott Pruitt is using public money to instead give huge pay raises to his political friends," Kildee said.

Pruitt's aides brought in as ADs also raised eyebrows last year.

Since AD hires are not technically political appointees, they don't have to sign President Trump's ethics pledge, leaving them free to talk to prior lobbying clients and employers. Beck and Byron Brown, EPA's deputy chief of staff for policy, both have ethics documents saying they didn't have to sign the pledge (Greenwire, March 20).

The ethics controversy attracted scrutiny from Democrats on Capitol Hill. The EPA inspector general soon initiated an audit of the AD hires, which is ongoing. The Government Accountability Office also launched a similar probe but put that on hold in order not to duplicate the IG's efforts.

The records, dated March 2017 and later July that year, also indicate some of Pruitt's top aides converted into more standard political appointees.

Forsgren, deputy assistant administrator in the water office, became a political appointee after being brought on first as an AD. He also signed Trump's ethics pledge.

Tate Bennett, head of EPA's public engagement office, was also listed as "administratively hired" at one point. She, too, signed the ethics pledge.

Others have moved elsewhere. Davis, another AD hire, is no longer a deputy assistant administrator but a senior adviser to the Region 8 administrator in Denver.

EPA press officials did not provide E&E News with the current number of AD hires at the agency.

At issue: 1977 amendments
After passing the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974, lawmakers soon realized that local utilities needed more training and expertise in order to enforce the drinking water standards the law had required EPA to promulgate.

The 1977 amendments were the first of what would be numerous changes to the law, but are generally considered relatively minor because they did not mandate any major changes to drinking water contaminant regulations.

Instead, the changes focused on ensuring EPA and local water utilities had the resources they needed to write and uphold new standards.

"In this age of sophisticated technology, manned flights to the moon and instrument landings on Mars, it is astounding that our drinking water is plagued by contamination," Rep. Paul Rogers (D-Fla.) explained on the House floor in July 1977. The amendments, he said, "are designed to help remedy the ills faced by our drinking water systems."

The law empowered EPA to provide technical assistance to states and localities, and gave the agency funding to train personnel.

The law also allowed EPA to hire "not more than 30 scientific, engineering, professional, legal and administrative positions within the EPA without regard to the civil service laws." The personnel would help not just with administering the Safe Drinking Water Act but also with "other provisions of law."

That language resulted from a compromise between the House and Senate, which initially sought to add 150 such positions.

Sen. Jennings Randolph (D-W.Va.) said on the floor in November 1977 that 150 appointees would "augment the agency's cadre of senior management and scientific personnel," which he said were "substantially smaller in proportion to Agency size than that of other federal agencies which carry out similar regulatory functions."

But after consulting with the House, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Civil Service Commission, Congress decided to allow just 30 appointees without regard to civil service regulations, but agreed to add 80 personnel to EPA under normal regulations.

That compromise, Rogers said, was the result of "extensive discussions and negotiations ... to determine the most critical needs for additional personnel and the most effective way of providing appointment authorities to meet those needs."

Pruitt is not the first EPA administrator to take advantage of the provision. Ken Kopocis, who led EPA's Office of Water during the first half of the Obama administration, said the provision was well known within EPA and has been used through the years.

"We used it to hire people who were well-experienced experts in their fields so that it could help augment, at the more senior levels of management, our ability to carry out our job," Kopocis said.

Those hired using the provision, Kopocis said, were experts in a variety of subjects, not just drinking water. He could not remember how many personnel were appointed under the position, and would not name those who had been hired as a result of it.

But, he said, the Obama administration's use of the provision differed from the Trump administration's.

"Our people worked in their field for a long time. Nobody would question their substance expertise on these issues," he said. "These were true professionals that fit more in the mold of what the provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act was designed to do, which is bring in people on an as-needed basis to help implement the Safe Drinking Water Act and other laws as well as you could."

Kopocis also said, to his knowledge, the Obama EPA never "recategorized someone" under the Safe Drinking Water Act provision "simply so we could give them a raise."

"If anyone got moved," he said, "it was to move into a new position where they had new responsibilities."

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/03/gop-lawmakers-want-to-oust-pruitt/
Vulnerable GOP Lawmaker Urges Trump To Oust Pruitt Over 'Corruption Scandals'
By Chris White, 4/3/18, 4:33 PM

Two Republican lawmakers are urging President Donald Trump to fire EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt after reports showed the agency chief rented a room from the wife of a lobbyist.

Pruitt's "corruption scandals are an embarrassment to the administration, and his conduct is grossly disrespectful to American taxpayers," Rep. Carlos Curbelo of Florida wrote Tuesday in a tweet. He is facing a bruising re-election campaign in a district former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton won in 2016.

Curbelo, a Republican who asked for Trump's help campaigning for re-election, was not the only Republican in his state to ask the president to dismiss Pruitt. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who is retiring from Congress, echoed Curbelo's sentiments in a statement to the reporters at The Huffington Post.

"When scandals and distractions overtake a public servant's ability to function effectively, another person should fill that role," she said. Curbelo and Ros-Lehtinen's remarks come less than two days after former New Jersey Republican Gov. Chris Christie told reporters that he doesn't know how Pruitt can "survive this one."

Curbelo and Ros-Lehtinen's criticisms came after reports Tuesday afternoon showed Pruitt rented a bedroom in a Capitol Hill townhouse used for multiple GOP fundraising events while he stayed there. He rented the bedroom from the spouse of an energy lobbyist before he officially joined the Trump administration.

The White House is reviewing how to handle Pruitt to "dig a little deeper," an official told The Wall Street Journal. The EPA, meanwhile, is defending the former Oklahoma AG's condo use, as well as his pricey flight travels, which were also scrutinized in February and March.

"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," agency spokesman Jahan Wilcox said in a statement about Pruitt's condo usage.

Ousting Pruitt could be a heavy lift, though. He is widely considered one of the most effective officials in the Trump administration. Pruitt announced Monday, for instance, that the EPA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration would begin crafting new greenhouse gas emission and mileage standards for vehicles built in 2022 through 2025.

Pruitt also criticized former President Barack Obama as he targeted Trump's predecessor's regulatory legacy. The EPA's announcement of the greenhouse gas emission revision will likely lead be met with support from states like Michigan and Ohio, both of which voted for Trump.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/381584-dem-scrutinizes-pruitts-morocco-trip-gas-industry-ties
Dem scrutinizes Pruitt's Morocco trip, gas industry ties
By Timothy Cama, 4/4/18, 10:13 AM

A Senate Democrat is probing a December trip that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt took to Morocco and the degree to which it was meant to benefit the natural gas industry.

"Recent disclosures raise new questions about this trip, and potential future international trips, given your close ties to the oil and gas industry," Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) wrote.

Citing calendars he obtained from the EPA, Whitehouse said in the letter he sent to Pruitt late Tuesday that he only had one briefing before the trip and it was conducted by political staff, not career staff in the agency's international affairs office, which generally coordinates foreign trips.

On the five-day trip that the EPA has said cost taxpayers around $40,000, Pruitt only worked one full day and had one-hour meetings the days before and after.

The main purpose of Pruitt's trip was to tout American liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, a purpose that Democrats say is not within the EPA's mission.

And in the time leading up to the Morocco trip, Pruitt met with numerous representatives of associations and companies with interests in LNG exports, including a Kinder Morgan meeting two days before the trip. That company is developing two LNG export terminals.

"If these were the individuals who advised you about your trip before you departed, it would suggest the purpose had little to do with EPA's mission and more to do with interests from your time in Oklahoma," wrote Whitehouse, a senior member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Pruitt was Oklahoma's attorney general from 2011 until he joined the Trump administration, in February 2017. He frequently sued the Obama administration's EPA over its environmental policies.

"We still do not know the full extent of your financial and political ties to the oil and gas industry, which would stand to benefit from the opening up of new markets for natural gas produced in the U.S.," he said.

Whitehouse asked for new details about the Morocco trip and whether Pruitt is planning trips to other countries to push LNG exports.

The letter comes amid growing controversies involving Pruitt and pressure from Democrats and a pair of Republicans for him to step down or be fired. He rented a condo co-owned by the wife of an energy lobbyist for $50 for each day he slept there, frequently flew first class on the taxpayers' dime and spent more than $43,000 on a soundproof booth for his office, among other controversies.

Among Whitehouse's questions were whether his condo rental played any role in the trip. Pruitt's landlord was Vicki Hart, whose husband, J. Steven Hart, leads the lobbying firm Williams and Jensen. That firm represents Cheniere Energy, which in December was the only company exporting LNG from the lower 48 states.

Democrats and environmentalists have long argued that the Morocco trip was an unnecessary waste of taxpayer money, since LNG exports are not part of EPA's responsibilities.

"While your home state of Oklahoma is the third-largest producer of natural gas in the country, I don't understand what the sale of natural gas has to do with the EPA's mission," Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) told Pruitt at a January hearing

"Promotion of natural gas is the kind of thing that the secretary of Energy or perhaps someone running for governor of Oklahoma or some other elected office there, but not consistent with what the head of the EPA should be doing."

The EPA's Office of Inspector General is investigating all of Pruitt's official travel in 2017, including the Morocco trip.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/article/2018/04/whitehouse-questions-motivations-behind-pruitt-morocco-trip-943768
Whitehouse questions motivations behind Pruitt Morocco trip
By Emily Holden, 4/3/18, 11:24 PM

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I) is seeking more information on EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's trip to Morocco in December where he touted natural gas, alleging that Pruitt had only one briefing ahead of time from political appointees and did not hear from career experts on international issues within the agency.

Citing calendars EPA shared with the Environment and Public Works Committee, Whitehouse asked whether the trip was meant to reward Pruitt's political allies, given that promoting natural gas exports is not typically part of an EPA administrator's job description. Pruitt's "one official briefing" happened Nov. 15, about a month before he left, and invitees were limited to aides who worked for Pruitt while he was Oklahoma attorney general or are connected to other political allies, according to Whitehouse. The briefing apparently did not include anyone from EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs, which typically handles foreign relations.

"If these were the individuals who advised you about your trip before you departed, it would suggest the purpose had little to do with EPA's mission and more to do with interests from your time in Oklahoma," Whitehouse wrote in a letter Tuesday night to Pruitt.

Whitehouse also noted Pruitt met with energy infrastructure company Kinder Morgan on Dec. 7, less than a week before he traveled to Morocco. Pruitt's public calendar also lists that meeting but provides no details.

Whitehouse also asked for more details on Pruitt's itinerary for the Morocco trip, during which travel delays required him to spend some time in Paris. Whitehouse says Pruitt's "calendars suggest no official business was planned" on that day. Pruitt's calendars show he was in Morocco for one full day, Dec. 12, and had one hourlong meeting planned on each of the preceding and following days, according to the letter.

Whitehouse asked whether Pruitt discussed liquefied natural gas exports with the lobbying firm Williams & Jensen, where J. Steven Hart works. Hart is married to Vicki Hart, who rented a $50-a-night Capitol Hill condo to Pruitt. Williams & Jensen's clients include liquefied natural gas exporter Cheniere Energy Inc.

Whitehouse also asked Pruitt to confirm reports and documents that suggest he may also visit other potential LNG-importing countries, including Japan, Mexico and China.

CNN
https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/03/politics/scott-pruitt-donald-trump-environment-policy/index.html
EPA's Pruitt fulfilling Trump's anti-regulatory agenda
By Juana Summers and Boris Sanchez, 4/3/18, 5:45 PM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is drawing scrutiny for his housing situation and travel practices, but in his role as the nation's top environmental official, he's a reliable administration foot soldier, making good on President Donald Trump's campaign promises for fewer environmental regulations and to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement.

Since he was confirmed to the job last February, Pruitt has taken an aggressive approach to rolling back Obama-era regulations, most recently this week's announcement that he would revise fuel efficiency rules designed to cut back on emissions of greenhouse gases.

"This is another step in the President's regulatory agenda, de-regulatory agenda ... a billion dollars in savings with respect to over 22 significant regulatory actions that we've been involved in here at the agency," Pruitt said at EPA headquarters Tuesday.

The announcement is the latest in a series of moves by Trump and Pruitt to dismantle Barack Obama's environmental legacy, moves that have drawn some scrutiny for their pace and breadth.

In the 14 months since he became the nation's top environmental policy official, Pruitt has bit-by-bit overseen the dismantling of a number of regulations and agreements across the agency, and impacting a wide range of issues.

Pruitt has withdrawn the "once in, always in" policy under the Clean Air Act, which determined how facilities that are major sources of hazardous air pollutants are regulated.

He announced plans to repeal the Clean Power Plan, the Obama-era climate rule regulating greenhouse gas emissions.

"I do think that the administration has been aggressively deregulatory across the board, across agencies. But the EPA stands out even in that crowd," Lisa Heinzerling, a Georgetown University law professor who served as the EPA's associate administrator for the Office of Policy between July 2009 and December 2010. "(Pruitt's) decisions appear to move all in one direction. He's not just limiting himself to one program. Across the agency, he appears to be acting in a uniformly deregulatory way."

Pruitt is the latest Cabinet official caught up in a swirl of bad press, facing an uncertain future within the Trump administration. But unlike the situations surrounding former Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the policies he's enacted seem to be in line with the President's policy goals.

In one instance, Pruitt is also now suggesting tacking on additional import restrictions onto a review of fuel efficiency regulations as a way to strengthen Trump's aggressive stance on tariffs and trade, according to a White House official familiar with recent discussions between the administration and the EPA. This source says the changes amount to "crazy import restrictions."

This source did not believe the restrictions would pass muster, but rather saw it as a way for Pruitt to carry favor with the President as the administrator faces intense scrutiny for possible ethical violations. The drafted restrictions would be unrealistic, according to this source, 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 source said.

The drafted restrictions, suggested unexpectedly on Friday by Pruitt's office, would raise greenhouse gas standards on imported vehicles as a way to limit the flow of foreign cars entering the United States, as per this source.

"The idea wasn't fully baked," said the source, but it comes at a time when the Trump administration is targeting imports, notably placing tariffs on steel and aluminum.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/381485-scott-pruitts-trojan-horse-transparency-proposal-would-undermine
Scott Pruitt's Trojan horse transparency proposal would undermine public health safeguards (*Op-Ed)
By Yogin Kothari, 4/3/18, 4:30 PM

In the past 50 years, we've taken real and important steps to keep America's air and water clean. Emissions of toxic pollutants like lead, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter have all fallen. In addition, we have taken several strides forward to clean up our rivers, lakes, and streams from harmful chemicals and waste.

Those advances didn't happen by accident. They happened because of laws like the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, which provided the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the tools it needed to put public protections in place to limit pollution. And, critically, these agencies were able to look at the best available science to craft those safeguards.

A new policy change under consideration by EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt would put all of that at risk.

Pruitt is planning to implement restrictions on what kinds of science the EPA can use to fulfill its mission to protect public health and the environment. Cloaked under the veil of "transparency," these new restrictions would make it impossible for the EPA to rely on the best available science to ensure that we have clean air, clean water, safer chemicals, and many other fundamental public health protections.

We haven't seen all the details of Pruitt's proposal yet—instead of speaking directly to the public about his plans; he announced the change in a closed-door meeting at the Heritage Foundation and then in an interview with the Daily Caller. It's ironic how secretive Pruitt has been about a policy supposedly meant to advance transparency; the National Association of Science Writers has criticized Pruitt's EPA for refusing to talk to the press about this change and its potential impacts.

While Pruitt's EPA hasn't been forthcoming about what they plan to do, we can expect that the basic outlines of this policy would be similar to legislation that House Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas) has unsuccessfully pushed for years, over the objection of the country's leading scientific societies In implementing such a policy, Pruitt would be making an end run around Congress, something he has repeatedly criticized previous administrations for doing.

This attack on science has a long history. The strategy was hatched in the 1990s by lobbyists for the tobacco industry, who invented the phrase "secret science" to undermine robust peer-reviewed research on the harmful impacts of second-hand smoke. The goal back then was to create procedural hurdles so that public health agencies couldn't finalize science-based safeguards. This has never been and still is not about increasing transparency. This is about weaponizing transparency to prevent science-based public health protections.

Under the rumored proposal, the EPA couldn't use a study unless it's perfectly "replicable" and all the underlying raw data is released to the public. That means that many of studies that are the foundation of our entire understanding of the public health impacts of pollution and exposure to toxic chemicals would be sidelined and ignored. Besides the fact that these studies rely on the private medical information of real people that obviously cannot be shared publicly, they also take place over long periods of time. And ethically, we can't take a population of six-year-old kids and expose them to the same level of mercury, lead, or PCB contamination that previous populations unfortunately experienced.

The studies that opened our eyes to the impacts of particulate matter, lead, and other health hazards have helped guide public policy for decades. Their methodology, design, and results are all publicly available and part of the administrative record. They've been re-analyzed and confirmed by new studies. And putting this science to work has had real benefits for thousands of communities across the country.

Pruitt is simply discarding the tools he needs to protect the public by mandating that an agency in charge of public health could no longer rely on the science of public health.

There are constructive ways to discuss transparency at the EPA. For example, Pruitt could convene a recognized independent scientific body to consider in what way transparency can be improved in crafting public protections.

This restriction on science is one of the clearest signs yet that Pruitt is simply uninterested in listening to the evidence or using his position to protect public health and the environment—the basic requirement of his job.

This proposal is a Trojan horse—it's presented as good government when what it actually represents is an abdication of the EPA's mission and an open signal to industry that they won't be held accountable. This policy kneecaps the scientific underpinnings of landmark-based laws that Americans count on every single day to protect their health.

If we're not using science to make decisions, we can't protect our communities. That might benefit polluting industries that have pushed this idea, but it comes as a huge cost to our health and well-being — and is a betrayal of the mission of the EPA.

NPR
https://www.npr.org/2018/04/04/599361744/working-with-scott-pruitt
Working With Scott Pruitt
4/4/18, 5:09 AM

DAVID GREENE, HOST:

Scott Pruitt, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, is facing pressure to resign after reports that he spent taxpayer money on lavish trips and first-class travel. Democrats want to investigate reports that Pruitt rented a condo linked to a fossil fuel lobbyist at a bargain price. And even Republicans are joining in. Congressman Carlos Curbelo of Florida called Pruitt's conduct, quote, "an embarrassment."

Let's bring in someone who knows Scott Pruitt well. David Rivkin is a conservative commentator and a constitutional lawyer who served under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. He also worked alongside Pruitt for years representing Oklahoma when Pruitt was that state's attorney general. Mr. Rivkin, welcome.

DAVID RIVKIN: Good to be with you.

GREENE: I understand you talk to Scott Pruitt fairly often. I mean, he is - has been seen as one of the rising stars in the Trump administration. How worried is he right now?

RIVKIN: I don't think he is worried at all. I think these attacks are driven entirely by the fact that he is one of the effective members of a Cabinet, loyal to the president, carrying out his agenda, getting a lot of things done and working extremely hard. So I really do not think he's going to make a dent. And I think everybody in Washington understands that these attacks are not driven by merit, not driven by any facts.

GREENE: You think there are explanations about, you know, spending taxpayer money on this first-class travel, explanations for this condo that's linked to a fossil fuel lobbyist that will satisfy people like even Congressman Curbelo, a Republican who called all this an embarrassment.

RIVKIN: I do, and most importantly, I think it satisfies the president. Again, look, my experience of working with Scott for a number of years is that he is a man of exceptional property (ph) extremely hardworking, committed to the rule of law. I find the notion that his judgment was in any way skewed by the things you are talking about to be absolutely preposterous.

GREENE: Even if they weren't, his judgment was not skewed. I mean, I guess it's possible that ethics investigators and so forth could find that he did something improper, even if it's not about his judgment, right?

RIVKIN: I absolutely believe that he has sought advice on all those matters. Again, this is the man I had the privilege of working with for a number of years. This was a man who is absolutely unassuming, austere in his personal habits. The notion that - look, I remember talking to him about work at 10, 11 o'clock at night. This is a man who travels in order to get things done. He does not travel because he enjoys it. And let me tell you, even the notion that flying these days, whether in (ph) coach and first class, is somehow pleasant, that's something you do for personal enjoyment, is just silly.

GREENE: The president on Monday said, quote, "we've got your back." I just want to play a quick clip of the president on Tuesday.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: I hope he's going to be good.

GREENE: That sounded like a little bit of a faint praise of Pruitt. Are you worried that the president might be losing confidence?

RIVKIN: No, I really don't. Of course, the question - that should be posed to the president, but I think he has strong support from the president, again, driven by merit. This is a person who is committed to the president's agenda, who's committed to the rule of law. He's working extremely hard and accomplishing everything he's supposed to accomplish. I, frankly, think even in this Cabinet there are very few people you can say that about. And I don't see anybody who can, frankly, do the kind of job he is doing.

GREENE: David Rivkin is a Washington, D.C.-based attorney who represented the state of Oklahoma when Scott Pruitt was the state's attorney general. He stays in touch with the EPA administrator, talking to us about him this morning. Mr. Rivkin, thanks so much.

RIVKIN: Good to be with you.