Off-The-Record Coffee with the New York Times' Coral Davenport
Thursday, May 18, 2017 at 2:45 PM – 3:15 PM

Location: Administrator Pruitt's Office
Reporter: Coral Davenport
Outlet: The New York Times
Topics: Federalism, employee morale, suing the EPA and the legal task ahead, Paris, organizational breakdown of the NYT

Reporter Biography:
Coral Davenport covers energy and climate change policy at The New York Times. She is regarded as an environmentalist, but also a tough and fair reporter who thinks one of President Trump's best cabinet picks was Scott Pruitt for the EPA. She has written for National Journal, Politico, and Congressional Quarterly. Davenport was a fellow with the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting.

Recent Stories:
Trump Administration Delays Decision on Leaving Climate Pact. "Also pushing hard for the president to exit the deal is Scott Pruitt, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, who will be responsible for carrying out Mr. Trump's climate change agenda, particularly his rollback of President Barack Obama's ambitious emissions regulations. ... Mr. Pruitt has warned that remaining in the Paris deal would create a major legal obstacle to his efforts to dismantle the Obama climate change regulations, since an opponent could argue that the United States is obligated to keep the regulations in place to meet the terms of the pact." (The New York Times, 05/09/17)

E.P.A. Dismisses Members of Major Scientific Review Board. "The Environmental Protection Agency has dismissed at least five members of a major scientific review board, the latest signal of what critics call a campaign by the Trump administration to shrink the agency's regulatory reach by reducing the role of academic research. A spokesman for the E.P.A. administrator, Scott Pruitt, said he would consider replacing the academic scientists with representatives from industries whose pollution the agency is supposed to regulate, as part of the wide net it plans to cast. "The administrator believes we should have people on this board who understand the impact of regulations on the regulated community," said the spokesman, J. P. Freire." (The New York Times, 05/07/17)

Scott Pruitt Is Seen Cutting the E.P.A. With a Scalpel, Not a Cleaver. "Mr. Pruitt, a lawyer who made a career suing the E.P.A., is not likely to start with the kind of shock and awe that Mr. Trump has used to disorient Washington. Instead, he will use the legal tools at his disposal to pare back the agency's reach and power, and trim its budget selectively." (New York Times, 02/05/17)

Recent Podcast:

'The Daily': The Climate Change Battle Through One Coal Miner's Eyes. "To Republicans, he's a hero. To Democrats, he's one of the biggest threats in the Trump administration. Scott Pruitt, the chief of the Environmental Protection Agency, is a man who confounds both sides." (New York Times, 03/30/17)

Deliberative Process / Ex. 5

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Trump Administration Delays Decision on Leaving Climate Pact
The New York Times
May 9, 2017
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/us/politics/trump-climate-pac

With top presidential aides stubbornly divided, the White House abruptly announced on Tuesday that President Trump would make no decision on the United States' future in the Paris climate change accord until June, after he returns from a meeting of the Group of 7 Western powers.

The announcement by the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, encouraged advocates of the landmark climate pact, who hope that Mr. Trump's fellow heads of state can pressure the president to remain in the accord, first at a NATO summit meeting in Brussels next week and then at the G-7 meeting in Taormina, Italy. Similar pressure was brought to bear by the leaders of Mexico and Canada when Mr. Trump threatened to withdraw from the North American Free Trade Agreement — then reversed course.

As Mr. Trump embarks on his first foreign trip since assuming office, heads of state are expected to point out to him that withdrawing from the deal is likely to affect his standing and credibility on the world stage as he seeks to press other elements of his foreign policy agenda, such as trade and military efforts to suppress the Islamic State.

"All the European governments hope that President Trump will stay in the Paris Agreement, and the G-7 can be the moment where he can measure the diplomatic cost of the pulling out," said Laurence Tubiana, the lead French climate negotiator of the 2015 accord. "It will be a fantastic opportunity to make that case."

The push has started. On Monday, when Mr. Trump called President-elect Emmanuel Macron of France to congratulate him on his victory, Mr. Macron told the president that enforcing and strengthening the Paris accord would be a top priority for him. Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada have told Mr. Trump that they value upholding the Paris deal, and Ms. Tubiana and other climate diplomats say they expect that other G-7 leaders will telephone Mr. Trump to convey the same message before convening in Italy.

"Other world leaders are likely to press on the president not only the importance they place on climate change but also the impact that pulling out will have on the president's other foreign policy priorities," said Nigel Purvis, a climate negotiator in the Clinton and Bush administrations. "And I think that will make an impression."

Opponents of remaining in the Paris pact, including the heads of conservative advocacy groups with close ties to the Trump administration, agreed that the delay could give the pact's supporters an edge.

"I think the remain camp sees delay to their advantage," wrote Thomas J. Pyle, an adviser to the Trump transition and the president of the Institute for Energy Research, a group that promotes fossil fuels and opposes most climate change policy. "It also invites a sustained campaign by the greens, media, industry to exert additional resources and pressure. They have more resources to bring to bear."

Mr. Trump's senior advisers have been locked in an impasse for weeks over whether or how to follow through on their boss's campaign pledge to pull the United States from the 195-nation accord, which was legally ratified last year.

Urging the president to remain in the deal are the president's daughter and son-in-law, Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, who have proved to be among the president's most influential advisers. Ms. Trump has tried to give the administration some green credentials by meeting with climate activists such as former Vice President Al Gore and the movie star Leonardo DiCaprio.

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Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson also favors remaining. Mr. Tillerson, the former Exxon Mobil chief executive, led the oil and gas giant when the accord was struck, and said even then that he favored it. As the nation's chief diplomat, he would have to absorb the world's displeasure if the United States exited the deal.

On the other side of the divide is the president's senior strategist, Stephen K. Bannon, who sees withdrawing from the global warming pact as the fulfillment of a key campaign promise. Most of the president's other senior advisers concur with Mr. Bannon, according to four people with direct knowledge of the discussions.

Also pushing hard for the president to exit the deal is Scott Pruitt, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, who will be responsible for carrying out Mr. Trump's climate change agenda, particularly his rollback of President Barack Obama's ambitious emissions regulations.

Under the Paris agreement, every nation has formally submitted plans to lower planet-warming pollution. The Obama administration pledged that the United States would reduce its carbon pollution about 26 percent from 2005 levels by 2025. However, that pledge depends on enactment of Mr. Obama's E.P.A.

regulations on coal-fired power plants, which Mr. Trump and Mr. Pruitt plan to substantially weaken or eliminate.

Mr. Pruitt has warned that remaining in the Paris deal would create a major legal obstacle to his efforts to dismantle the Obama climate change regulations, since an opponent could argue that the United States is obligated to keep the regulations in place to meet the terms of the pact.

On Monday, a coalition of about 40 conservative advocacy groups, some of which directly advised the Trump campaign and transition, signed a letter to Mr. Trump supporting Mr. Pruitt's view. Many of the signers have a history of denying the established science of climate change and lobbying against climate change policy, such as the Heartland Institute, Americans for Tax Reform and the Heritage Foundation.

"Failing to withdraw from Paris exposes key parts of your deregulatory agenda to unnecessary legal risk," they wrote.

But under the Paris deal, those numerical targets are not legally binding, and there are no sanctions for failing to meet them. The primary legal requirements of the deal are that countries put forth their emissions reductions targets, and later release reports verifying how they are meeting the targets. The Trump administration could stay in the deal and submit a less ambitious target that could be reached without new policies as the United States transitions to a cleaner economy.

Officials close to Mr. Trump say the president understands that remaining in the pact could give him leverage in other discussions with countries adhering to it. Abandoning it could shred the political capital he is trying to build globally.

Meanwhile, Mr. Obama made a pitch on Monday to remain in the deal. Speaking at a conference in Milan focused on climate change and sustainable food development, Mr. Obama said the United States should not "sit on the sidelines" of the Paris Agreement.

"During the course of my presidency, I made climate change a top priority because I believe that of all the challenges that we face, this is the one that will define the contours of this century, more dramatically perhaps than any other," he said.