EPA News Highlights 4.23.18

The Washington Post: Pruitt to unveil controversial 'transparency' rule limiting what research EPA can use
Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is expected to propose a rule Tuesday that would establish new standards for what science could be used in writing agency regulations, according to individuals briefed on the plan. It is a sweeping change long sought by conservatives. The rule, which Pruitt has described in interviews with select media over the past month, would only allow EPA to consider studies for which the underlying data are made available publicly. Advocates describe this approach as an advance for transparency, but critics say it would effectively block the agency from relying on long-standing, landmark studies linking air pollution and pesticide exposure to harmful health effects.

Inside EPA: EPA's Ross Eyes Greater Water Policy 'Engagement,' Incremental Changes
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The Daily Caller: SOURCES: Most Of What EPA's Leaker Told Dems About Scott Pruitt Is 'False'
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The Washington Examiner: EPA's Scott Pruitt says burning wood is renewable energy
The Environmental Protection Agency will begin treating energy created by burning trees as renewable, the same as wind and solar. Biomass from burning wood to produce electricity will be considered carbon-neutral, the EPA announced Monday. "Today's announcement grants America's foresters much-needed certainty and clarity with respect to the carbon neutrality of forest biomass," Administrator Scott Pruitt said Monday after meeting with forest industry representatives during a visit to a school in Georgia. "Managed forests improve air and water quality, while creating valuable jobs and thousands of products that improve our daily lives. This is environmental stewardship in action." The recent spending bill passed by Congress had directed the EPA, Energy Department and Agriculture Department to "reflect the carbon-neutrality of forest bioenergy and recognize biomass as a renewable energy source."

National News Highlights 4.23.18

Reuters: Senate committee paves way for Pompeo to become top U.S. diplomat
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one of Trump's closest advisers during his 15 months as CIA director. He most recently has been deeply involved in preparations for Trump's summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, including meeting with him three weeks ago

The Wall Street Journal: Driver Plows Van Into Toronto Pedestrians, Kills 10

A man in his mid-20s plowed a rented van into people walking along a busy Toronto thoroughfare on Monday, killing 10 and injuring 15, and rattled one of North America's safest major cities. Police said they arrested the driver, Alek Minassian, 25 years old, of Ontario. Authorities said Monday evening that they were still trying to determine his motive. "We cannot come to any firm conclusions at this stage," said Canada's Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale. But he said there was "no national security connection" to the attack, based on the evidence police have seen so far. Toronto Chief of Police Mark Saunders said the attack "looks intentional." The casualties occurred on one of the city's first warm spring days, along Toronto's main artery, Yonge Street. Mass killings have been much rarer in Canada than in the U.S. and Europe, and many said they were stunned.

Politico: Ronny Jackson's VA nomination on the rocks

Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson's nomination to be Veterans Affairs secretary may be in trouble, according to senators and aides in both parties. Republicans are considering postponing his confirmation hearing this week as senators pore over potentially new negative information that committee members have received, according to GOP sources familiar with the matter. And Senate Democrats are digging into his record after being made aware of potential new problems with the nomination. On Monday evening, committee Democrats huddled in the Capitol office of Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, the top committee Democrat, to plot strategy. "There's a need for very exacting and close scrutiny and vetting," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) after the meeting. "And some questions that need to be answered. I'm not going to comment on any of the specifics, except to say we're going to be doing very close and careful scrutiny."

The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2018/04/24/pruitt-to-unveil-controversial-transparency-rule-limiting-what-research-epa-can-use/?utm_term=.ef6bdbd6cb3f

Pruitt to unveil controversial 'transparency' rule limiting what research EPA can use

By Juliet Eilperin and Brady Dennis, 4/24/18

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt is expected to propose a rule Tuesday that would establish new standards for what science could be used in writing agency regulations, according to individuals briefed on the plan. It is a sweeping change long sought by conservatives.

The rule, which Pruitt has described in interviews with select media over the past month, would only allow EPA to consider studies for which the underlying data are made available publicly. Advocates describe this approach as an advance for transparency, but critics say it would effectively block the agency from relying on long-standing, landmark studies linking air pollution and pesticide exposure to harmful health effects.

In an interview Sunday with radio host John Catsimatidis on 970 AM in New York, Pruitt described the change as a way to let the public judge "the data, the methodology, the analytics" behind any scientific analysis presented to the EPA as it drafts regulations.

"That's transparency," he told Catsimatidis. "It gives people the opportunity in real time to peer review. It goes to the heart of what we should be about as an agency."

The individuals briefed on the rule, which will be subject to a 30-day comment period, spoke on the condition of anonymity in advance of the announcement.

Many scientists argue that applying a standard to public health and environmental studies that is not currently required by peer-reviewed journals would limit the information the EPA could take into account when crafting federal limits on everything from power-plant emissions to which chemicals can be used in agriculture and in homes. Some researchers

collect personal data from subjects but pledge to keep it confidential — as was the case in a major 1993 study by Harvard University that established the link between fine-particle air pollution and premature deaths. That practice would not be allowed under the new rule.

House Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Tex.) sought to establish a requirement similar to the one Pruitt will propose through legislation, but it failed to pass both chambers.

On Monday, 985 scientists signed a letter organized by the Union of Concerned Scientists urging Pruitt not to forge ahead with the policy change.

"There are ways to improve transparency in the decision-making process, but restricting the use of science would improve neither transparency nor the quality of EPA decision-making," they wrote. "If fully implemented, this proposal would greatly weaken EPA's ability to comprehensively consider the scientific evidence across the full array of health studies."

Under the proposed rule, third parties would be able to test and try to replicate the findings of studies submitted to EPA. But, the scientists wrote, "many public health studies cannot be replicated, as doing so would require intentionally and unethically exposing people and the environment to harmful contaminants or recreating one-time events."

Andrew Rosenberg, director of the Union of Concerned Scientists' Center for Science and Democracy, said in an email that Pruitt's move would expand on his earlier decision to change the standards for who can serve on EPA's advisory committees. Last year, Pruitt barred any scientists from serving if they received EPA grants for their work. Researchers funded by industries regulated by the agency to continue serving, however.

"First, they came after the agency's independent science advisers, and now, they're going after the science itself," Rosenberg said. "What is transparent is the unabashed takeover of EPA leadership by individuals who have demonstrated disinterest in helping communities combat pollution by using the best available science."

Inside EPA

http://insideepa.com/daily-news/epas-ross-eyes-greater-water-policy-engagement-incremental-changes

EPA's Ross Eyes Greater Water Policy 'Engagement,' Incremental Changes

By Laura Beaven, 4/23/18

EPA water chief David Ross is looking for ways to replicate in other rulemakings the type of engagement the agency used with states to discuss changes to the Obama-era Clean Water Act (CWA) jurisdiction rule, while stressing the need for incremental progress with water policies rather than trying to accomplish everything at once.

Speaking at the National Water Policy Fly-In April 17 in Washington, D.C., Ross outlined his priorities as assistant administrator of the Office of Water, and said his overarching goal is to be proactive instead of reactive. The fly-in was sponsored by the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, the Water Environment Federation, the Water Research Foundation and WateReuse.

One example of how Ross wants to change the way EPA does business is to change the process of consultation with state and local governments and the regulated community into one of "engagement," he said, pointing to the process used with the jurisdiction rule. In that case, EPA invited nine states to each bring three representatives, including state agriculture directors, for two days of talks with the agency, he said.

"We got really close to the vision I have for engagement," Ross said, adding that the challenge now is figuring out "how do I replicate that to other rulemakings."

In terms of other areas of focus, Ross said “aging infrastructure is priority 1, 2 and 3” and is part of Administrator Scott Pruitt's focus on “back to basics.”

“Infrastructure at a high level is what I was focused on coming in,” with a goal of making “incremental improvements on an annual basis,” Ross said.

Using a baseball analogy, Ross said he prefers to “take the safe singles” rather than take bigger risks that may not work.

One aspect of aging infrastructure that has received great attention from Pruitt is the need to replace lead drinking water service lines, something that could be addressed in the agency's upcoming proposal to revise the Safe Drinking Water Act lead and copper rule (LCR).

Recommendations from the agency's National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) in 2015 on how to change the LCR included a call for drinking water utilities to conduct full lead service line replacements (LSLRs), rather than partial replacements.

But legal and financial questions over how to accomplish this remain unanswered, and drinking water utilities recently urged EPA to focus on “financially prudent” ways to reduce human health risks when revising the LCR, noting that it may be impossible to include all of NDWAC's recommendation in the proposed rule.

Ross said EPA is “working hard to balance the competing needs” within the LCR revisions and that “you'll see some action this year.”

During a panel discussion after Ross' speech, Peter Grevatt, director of the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water, said Pruitt is very focused on LSLR and noted the administrator's recent visit to Cincinnati to meet with local water utilities and tour two LSLR construction sites.

Grevatt said he suggested the April 16 Cincinnati trip, in part because the city is proactively working to remove its lead pipes rather than doing so because of elevated levels of lead in its drinking water.

Lead Programs

In an April 16 EPA press release, Cathy Bailey, director of the Greater Cincinnati Water Works, said Pruitt's “visit gave us a chance to explain our enhanced lead program that includes education, outreach and removal of lead service lines. Our program wasn’t mandated by regulations, but implemented because it is the right thing to do for our community, and we believe it can serve as a model across the country.”

Grevatt echoed the agency's emphasis on helping utilities find a way to conduct LSLRs. “It's not just that we'll order you to do that,” he said.

Ross also suggested that the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program could provide funding for LSLRs. EPA is prioritizing projects that reduce lead for its next round of WIFIA loans.

Another area Ross highlighted as a priority is nutrient pollution. “I want to aggressively go after it, but holistically,” he said, adding that EPA has previously “missed the opportunity to engage with state agriculture directors” on ways to prevent nutrient runoff.

Ross said he wants EPA research to be focused on how to solve the problem. Later, during a question-and-answer session, he said that to date much of the agency's research has been focused on measuring nutrients downstream but he wants it to tackle the question of “how do you get source reduction?”

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A water utility representative from Bowling Green, OH, asked Ross if there is any way to leverage WIFIA funds for agriculture projects.

Ross, after consulting with Office of Wastewater Management Director Andrew Sawyers, said, yes. "WIFIA is a very flexible program," Ross said. If a bunch of rural communities wanted to get together and develop a WIFIA proposal, they could, he said.

"Farmers are willing to do the work" to reduce nutrient runoff, especially if they can see the results, Ross said.

Ross also said he wants to "take a long hard look at trading," saying that it "hasn't been utilized enough" and that he likes the idea of utilizing nature to treat agricultural runoff.

Water Trading

During a second question-and-answer period, other EPA water officials reiterated Ross' interest in trading.

John Goodin, acting director of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, said Ross is particularly interested in figuring out how to remove current hindrances to water quality trading.

And Sawyers said there are "some real opportunities around watershed permitting," adding that some states are looking how to enhance or retool their trading programs.

While water quality trading programs can be developed to address any number of pollutants, most have focused on nutrients. Nutrient credit trading programs are designed to allow a point source to purchase pollutant reduction credits from another point source or a nonpoint source in the same watershed with the intent of meeting the discharge limits established in a Clean Water Act discharge permit

The Government Accountability Office last year found that states with the greatest number of nutrient water quality trades are those with discharge limits dictated by a regulatory cleanup plan, and that without such a driver, trading is unlikely to occur. -- Lara Beaven (lbeaven@iwpnews.com)

The Daily Caller

http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/23/sources-epa-leaker-dems-scott-pruitt-false/

SOURCES: Most Of What EPA's Leaker Told Dems About Scott Pruitt Is 'False'

By Michael Bastasch, 4/23/18

A former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) official likely behind negative media stories about Administrator Scott Pruitt doesn't have all his facts straight, according to sources familiar with EPA's inner-workings.

Former Trump campaign official Kevin Chmielewski, who's also former EPA deputy chief of staff operations, gave congressional Democrats a list of accusations against Pruitt, detailing the administrator's alleged "wasteful spending" and "disregard for ethical and legal requirements."

Chmielewski is the likely source for media reports surrounding Pruitt's spending habits and alleged ethical lapses. Chmielewski was allegedly removed from his position at EPA for challenging Pruitt, but that hasn't been confirmed, reports said.

But many of Chmielewski's claims have been called into question by two sources familiar with EPA's inner-workings. One source told The Daily Caller News Foundation of Chmielewski's claims that "more than 60 percent is false, the other 40 percent is information he distorted."

In one instance Chmielewski alleged "a $30,000 contract with private Italian security personnel entered into by Mr. [Pasquele] Nino Perrotta," ahead of Pruitt's attendance of a G7 summit in Italy.

However, two sources familiar with Pruitt's security said that never happened, adding Perrotta, the special agent in charge of Pruitt's security detail, would have had no authority to enter into such a contract on his own.

The "special agent in charge has no authority to make purchase agreements or authorize people to make purchases," one source told TheDCNF. Perrotta would need approval from higher-ups in the Office of Criminal Enforcement and Forensic Training, the source said.

Perrotta did communicate with contacts in Italy but only to get an idea of what sort of security would be typical for a U.S. official of Pruitt's stature, not to negotiate a five-figure security contract, a second source said.

Before joining EPA in 2004, Perrotta joined the Secret Service in 1995. Before that, Perrotta served as an Army intelligence officer for three years and did tours in Italy, Bulgaria and Romania.

Like his boss, Perrotta's become the focus of intense media scrutiny, including a New York Times article that referred to the special agent as Pruitt's "sheriff." NYT's April 12 article, published the same day as Democrats' letter, repeated many of Chmielewski's accusations.

"Perrotta, has clashed — at least once physically — with top EPA officials who challenged Mr. Pruitt's spending, and has steered at least one EPA security contract to a business associate," current and former officials told NYT.

Likewise, "at least one security-related contract was awarded to an individual who works at Mr. Perrotta's private security firm, and he believes that other contracts may also have been awarded to friends or associates of Mr. Perrotta's," Chmielewski told Democrats.

It's true EPA hired Edwin Steinmetz to conduct a security sweep of Pruitt's office in 2017, costing the agency $3,000. Steinmetz is listed on the management team of Perrotta's security firm he operates on the side named Sequoia Security Group.

"It was an emergency; they needed it right away," Steinmetz told NYT. "I dropped everything and took care of it." None of the money Steinmetz was paid went to Sequoia Security Group, and there's no evidence Perrotta played a role in any other security contracts.

Both DCNF sources confirmed Steinmetz's security sweep but contested NYT's characterization Perrotta "steered" the contract toward them. EPA hadn't conducted a security sweep in years and asked Perrotta for a recommendation, the sources said.

EPA contracting officials took the ball from there, the source said. Steinmetz got the $3,000 job through an official agency process, both sources said.

"Very few people are qualified in that specific field and EPA had a hard time finding a vendor," one source said.

Perrotta got permission from EPA to operate a side business in 2013, during the Obama administration. As for "physically" clashing with an EPA official, as NYT alleged, that never happened, one source told TheDCNF.

"Things got so heated that a scuffle broke out during a meeting last summer of the agency's top security and administrative staff" where "Perrotta traded expletives with Mario Caraballo, who until recently served as the deputy

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associate administrator of the homeland security office, and that the two men had to be physically separated," NYT reported.

The discussion between Caraballo and Perrotta got heated, but no physical altercation broke out, a source, who spoke with officials present at the meeting, said. Caraballo has since been removed from his position at EPA.

The Washington Examiner

https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/epas-scott-pruitt-says-burning-wood-is-renewable-energy

EPA's Scott Pruitt says burning wood is renewable energy

By Josh Siegel 4/23/18

The Environmental Protection Agency will begin treating energy created by burning trees as renewable, the same as wind and solar.

Biomass from burning wood to produce electricity will be considered carbon-neutral, the EPA announced Monday.

"Today's announcement grants America's foresters much-needed certainty and clarity with respect to the carbon neutrality of forest biomass," Administrator Scott Pruitt said Monday after meeting with forest industry representatives during a visit to a school in Georgia. "Managed forests improve air and water quality, while creating valuable jobs and thousands of products that improve our daily lives. This is environmental stewardship in action."

The recent spending bill passed by Congress had directed the EPA, Energy Department and Agriculture Department to "reflect the carbon-neutrality of forest bioenergy and recognize biomass as a renewable energy source."

Georgia and other large timber states had lobbied the EPA to consider biomass carbon-neutral when the states were facing limits on carbon emissions from power plants required by the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, one of its key climate change initiatives. Pruitt has begun a process for repealing and replacing the Clean Power Plan, which was never implemented because of court challenges.

The EPA says it will consider biomass as carbon neutral when devising regulatory actions on energy production from power plants, such as a potentially revised, more modest Clean Power Plan.

"The use of biomass from managed forests can bolster domestic energy production, provide jobs to rural communities, and promote environmental stewardship by improving soil and water quality, reducing wildfire risk, and helping to ensure our forests continue to remove carbon from the atmosphere," the EPA said in a policy document explaining the move.

Despite Pruitt's action, EPA's science advisers haven't come to a consensus on whether biomass is carbon-neutral. Many scientists say that while biomass is a renewable resource, it is not carbon-neutral because burning wood for energy releases large amounts of carbon all at once, faster than what is absorbed by newly planted forests.

The EPA's policy statement contends that U.S. forests absorb more carbon from the air than burning wood releases. In 2015, forests offset about 11.2 percent of gross U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, the agency says.
The EPA said it will continue to enforce current air pollution regulations against power generation from biomass as it normally would, not treating it as carbon-neutral.

"This statement of agency policy is not a scientific determination and does not revise or amend any scientific determinations that EPA has previously made," the EPA document says. "Although this policy announcement does not itself alter sources' obligations with regard to [greenhouse gases] and CO2 in any particular regulatory program, the

agency is committed to addressing regulatory uncertainty about how it treats biogenic CO2 emissions in forthcoming actions under various EPA programs."

Reuters

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-pompeo/senate-committee-paves-way-for-pompeo-to-become-top-u-s-diplomat-idUSKBN1HU26X

Senate committee paves way for Pompeo to become top U.S. diplomat

By Patricia Zengerle, 4/23/18

A U.S. Senate committee approved the nomination of President Donald Trump's choice for secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, on Monday after a Republican senator who had been opposed threw his support behind the CIA director in the face of party pressure.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the nomination on a party-line vote, with all 11 Republicans backing him, nine Democrats opposed and one Democrat, Chris Coons, voting "present" because one Republican was at a funeral out of town.

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said there were enough votes in the full Senate to confirm Pompeo this week. That would allow Pompeo to attend a NATO summit on Friday.

Pompeo became one of Trump's closest advisers during his 15 months as CIA director. He most recently has been deeply involved in preparations for Trump's summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, including meeting with him three weeks ago.

While many Democrats consider Pompeo too hawkish and worry about past harsh statements on homosexuality and Islam, he has the support of at least three Democratic senators not on the committee who are running for re-election in states Trump won easily in 2016. That all but assures Pompeo will be confirmed.

"I do not believe Director Pompeo is someone who will always prioritize diplomacy over conflict, particularly in the context of the aggressive foreign policy voices growing around him," said Senator Robert Menendez, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, citing Pompeo's past openness to regime change in North Korea and Iran.

No Republican besides Senator Rand Paul, who changed his vote on Monday, had announced opposition.

Paul's late switch meant Pompeo avoided the embarrassment of being the first nominee for secretary of state to fail to secure the committee's endorsement since it began considering them in the late 19th century.

That would have weakened Pompeo's reputation internationally and cast a cloud over Trump's push to overhaul his national security team after firing Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and replacing his national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, with John Bolton, also known as a hawk.

The White House and Republican Party had thrown their weight behind the nomination, with unceasing attacks on Democrats for opposing Trump's pick.

Paul had opposed Pompeo for weeks, holding a news conference to announce his opposition to him, as well as Trump's pick to replace him at the CIA, Deputy CIA Director Gina Haspel.

Haspel, whose Senate confirmation hearing is next month, also faces a tough confirmation fight. Democrats, and some Republicans, are concerned about her links to the CIA's past use of "harsh interrogation techniques," widely seen as torture.

Paul has repeatedly threatened opposition on policy positions staked out by Trump, before changing his mind at the last minute. Trump recently predicted he would come around again on Pompeo, calling Paul "a good man" who has "never let us down."

The Wall Street Journal

https://www.wsj.com/articles/van-strikes-pedestrians-in-toronto-1524508659

Driver Plows Van Into Toronto Pedestrians, Kills 10

By Vipal Monga and Jacquie McNish, 4/24/18

A man in his mid-20s plowed a rented van into people walking along a busy Toronto thoroughfare on Monday, killing 10 and injuring 15, and rattled one of North America's safest major cities.

Police said they arrested the driver, Alek Minassian, 25 years old, of Ontario. Authorities said Monday evening that they were still trying to determine his motive.

"We cannot come to any firm conclusions at this stage," said Canada's Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale. But he said there was "no national security connection" to the attack, based on the evidence police have seen so far.

Toronto Chief of Police Mark Saunders said the attack "looks intentional."

The casualties occurred on one of the city's first warm spring days, along Toronto's main artery, Yonge Street. Mass killings have been much rarer in Canada than in the U.S. and Europe, and many said they were stunned.

"I'm at a loss for words. I can't believe that this has happened here. Things like this don't happen in Canada," said, Melissa Phillips, a nurse who was walking her dog Monday evening just steps away from where pedestrians were hit earlier.

The van jumped up onto the sidewalk around 1:30 p.m. Monday, hitting pedestrians as it headed south for about a mile. Police said 26 minutes lapsed between the first 911 call and the driver's arrest.

The area where the incident occurred is home to people of many ethnic backgrounds, said John Filion, a city councilor representing the area where the incident took place, but is predominantly home to immigrants from Iran, Iraq, Korea and elsewhere in Asia. Businesses in the area include banks, pensions, and government buildings, as well as retail shops.

"This is the kind of community where you rarely even encounter angry people, let alone something like this," said Mr. Filion. "It's a such a shock."

Toronto resident Reza Bahramian said he was out enjoying the nice weather when he saw a van "cut everything." He and some other neighbors started chasing after the van and yelling for it to stop. They saw about four people get hit.

He said he helped one woman who was struck, with CPR, for about half-hour before paramedics arrived. "Blood flowed on the sidewalk," he said, referring to the numerous injuries of people who were hit.

Another witness said in an interview he saw two responders trying to give CPR to two people lying in the street, but eventually the responders covered their bodies with tarps.

Witness Alex Shaker told CTV news that the van was moving at high speed along the sidewalk, striking everything in its way.

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"People just with a stroller, with their baby, everything was flying down one by one. And he was going really fast," Mr. Shaker told the network.

The CP24 channel aired witnesses' videos that showed a black-clad man by the white van appearing to point something at a police officer before he drops it and is forced to the ground and handcuffed.

In Canada, mass-casualty events are relatively rare, but when they happen, they loom large: The country reeled after 14 women were killed by gunman at the Universite du Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique in 1989, and again in 2016 after four people were killed in a shooting in La Loche, Saskatchewan.

On Monday afternoon, over a mile of Yonge Street was cordoned off with yellow police tape and the area was swarming with cars from both the Toronto police and the Ontario provincial police. Police were interviewing passersby and asking if they had witnessed the incident.

"I ask everyone to await the results of the police investigation and avoid speculation," Toronto Mayor John Tory said.

"It was with great sadness that I heard about the tragic and senseless attack that took place in Toronto," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a statement Monday night. He said officials were monitoring events closely, and would work with law-enforcement agencies across the country to ensure Canadians' security.

"As of now, #ISIS channels are not promoting the #Toronto vehicular attack, which contains staples of ISIS-inspired events," said Rita Katz, executive director at SITE Intel Group, which monitors jihadist activity online, on Twitter. ISIS channels typically share images and statements celebrating jihadist attacks on the encrypted messaging app Telegram, and the terror group has previously used vehicles in attacks on the streets of major cities such as London and New York.

Attacks involving either a van or truck striking pedestrians have also unfolded in New York City and some of Europe's urban centers.

Sayfullo Saipov, a 29-year-old Uzbek man, was charged with killing eight people and injuring 12 others last October after driving a rented truck down a crowded Manhattan bike path. Law-enforcement officials say the deadly drive had been planned for weeks and was done in the name of Islamic State. Mr. Saipov has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

In Europe over the past two years, 86 people were killed after a truck drove through crowds watching Bastille Day fireworks in Nice, France; 12 people died after a rejected Tunisian asylum seeker rammed a stolen truck into a busy Christmas market in Berlin; and in Barcelona, 13 died and over 100 were injured after a van mowed down pedestrians on city's most famous central thoroughfare, Las Ramblas.

Politico

https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/23/ronny-jackson-veterans-affairs-nomination-hearing-546408

Ronny Jackson's VA nomination on the rocks

By Burgess Everett and Elana Schor, 4/23/18

Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson's nomination to be Veterans Affairs secretary may be in trouble, according to senators and aides in both parties.

Republicans are considering postponing his confirmation hearing this week as senators pore over potentially new negative information that committee members have received, according to GOP sources familiar with the matter. And Senate Democrats are digging into his record after being made aware of potential new problems with the nomination.

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On Monday evening, committee Democrats huddled in the Capitol office of Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, the top committee Democrat, to plot strategy.

“There’s a need for very exacting and close scrutiny and vetting,” said Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) after the meeting. “And some questions that need to be answered. I’m not going to comment on any of the specifics, except to say we’re going to be doing very close and careful scrutiny.”

Republicans and Democrats alike have been talking over the weekend, and in person on Monday, about the potential for allegations to derail Jackson’s nomination, senators said. But the nature of discussions now going on about the material is “conversational,” said Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.).

Tillis suggested that the Jackson confirmation hearing scheduled for Wednesday may be "pushed back pending a review of some of this stuff that, like I said, I've only heard on a conversational basis. I think that's where we'll spend our time this week."

Jackson is President Donald Trump’s physician at the White House and is already facing major questions from Republicans over his lack of experience managing an agency as large as the VA. If he faces additional problems, his nomination could be derailed entirely.

“I would like to hear what he has to say about that. I’m not sure anybody can run the VA. It’s so big,” said Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-Texas). “But I’m willing to give him the benefit of the doubt and listen to him and hear what he has in mind.”

Axios was first to report that new information about Jackson’s “professional conduct” was taken to Tester earlier this month.

Democrats declined to comment on the severity of the allegations that have been presented to the committee about Jackson.

“We’re going to vet him. The Trump administration doesn’t do a particularly good job,” said Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), another committee member. "That's all I'm going to say."

Spokespeople for the committee did not comment on whether Jackson's hearing has been postponed. But a Republican working on the nomination said it was unlikely the hearing would take place pending review of the new information, though that source cautioned that few have seen the documents rattling the nomination.

“You have to be concerned about any nomination” in a closely divided Senate, the Republican said.

Republicans currently hold just 51 seats and Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) is recovering from cancer treatment, leaving them no margin for error if Democrats unify to oppose the nomination.

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