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Subject: News Clips - 27 April 2018

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

Administrator Pruitt Coverage

Mother Jones - House Republicans on Scott Pruitt: We're With Him

Washington Examiner - Republicans mostly hold their fire on Scott Pruitt, stand by him in nod to Trump

Politico - Inhofe 'reassured' by Pruitt's congressional testimony

Washington Examiner - Scott Pruitt says courts 'struck down' climate rules he is repealing

Politico - EPA delivers first batch of travel documents to Gowdy's panel

E&E News PM - First-class travel became 'distraction' — Pruitt

Wall Street Journal - Pruitt Says Attacks Are Driven by Opposition to Trump

Politico - 'Embarrassment' or 'McCarthyism': Key moments as Pruitt faces lawmakers

Reuters - Grilled by U.S. lawmakers, Trump's EPA chief calls ethics scandals lies

New York Times - Scott Pruitt, on Capitol Hill, Deflects Blame for Ethical Lapses

Washington Post - Scott Pruitt admits little culpability in EPA controversies, mostly blames aides and staff

AP - At hearings, EPA chief seeks to divert blame for ethics woes

Bloomberg - Pruitt's Capitol Hill Defense: Don't Blame Me

Politico - EPA prepping documents in response to Oversight probe

Daily Caller - SCOOP: EPA Memo Suggests Pruitt Did Not Lie To Fox News About Staff Raises

Politico - Documents: EPA reversed raises one day after Pruitt's Fox interview

Politico - EPA says chief of staff had authority to raise salaries without Pruitt's review

Politico - McCollum questions Pruitt justification for security costs

Politico - Pruitt distances himself from LNG promotion on Morocco trip

Washington Examiner - Scott Pruitt blames ambassador for talking up energy exports in Morocco

The Hill - IG: Threat memo cited by Pruitt isn't from IG

ABC News - Highlights from Pruitt's marathon day on Capitol Hill

The Hill - Five takeaways from Pruitt's big testimony

The Hill - Christine Todd Whitman: Scott Pruitt is unfit to run the EPA (*Op-Ed)

Washington Post - Scott Pruitt's feisty defense of himself may have been good enough to save his job of destroying the earth! (*Op-Ed)

Washington Post - Robert Redford: The biggest Scott Pruitt scandal is the one right in front of us

General

Daily Caller - Pruitt Points Out 'An Inconvenient Truth' About Obama's Attempts To Regulate Carbon Emissions

E&E Greenwire - New Source Review rulemaking possible — Pruitt

BNA - EPA Working on Legal Basis for Year-Round Biofuels Sales: Pruitt

Politico - Pruitt leaves door open to Lake Erie TMDL

BNA - Pruitt and His Air Chief Diverge on Industrial Expansion Permits

Daily Signal - Scott Pruitt's Effort to Expose 'Secret Science' Has Environmentalists Scared Stiff

E&E Greenwire - OMB backdates completion date for 'secret science' review

The Hill - EPA approved aide to work for GOP firm, Florida lawmaker

E&E Daily - Pruitt aide approved to work for GOP firm, Fla. lawmaker

Daily Caller - Free Market Groups Call For Clean Power Plan To End

Los Angeles Times - Trump administration aims to block California on fuel economy targets

The Hill - Dem AGs renew call for Pruitt to recuse himself from climate rule repeal process

The Hill - New York threatens to sue Trump over EPA climate rule repeal

The Hill - EPA removes 'international priorities' page from site

AP - Smoke from Wisconsin refinery explosion poses health risk

Bloomberg - Tesla's Foe in Fight Over Electric Vehicle Rebate: Utilities

Politico - Ronny Jackson drama overshadows Pompeo success for White House

Washington Times - Rep. Steve King: Democrats raised the standards too high for Cabinet appointments

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Mother Jones
https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2018/04/house-republicans-on-scott-pruitt-were-with-him/
House Republicans on Scott Pruitt: We're With Him
By Rebecca Leber, 4/26/18, 4:18 PM

One of the reasons Scott Pruitt has probably survived this long at the Environmental Protection Agency is that he still has key Republican support in Congress. It was clear Thursday that House Republicans were still willing to defend him, when Pruitt appeared before the House Energy and Commerce and the House Appropriations subcommittees.

The hearings followed a pattern. Democrats grilled Pruitt on the ethical problems surrounding his administration—or spent their remaining time with monologues about his actions. Republicans were less interested in getting answers from Pruitt on what subcommittee chair Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.) called his "stewardship" of the agency, and spent more time focusing on the "policy" they agreed with. Despite Pruitt's innumerable and well-documented ethical violations and questionable spending patterns, many Republicans in the hearing used their time to offer support for the embattled EPA head.

"It's shameful today that this hearing has turned into a personal attack hearing and a shameful attempt to denigrate the work that's being done at the EPA," Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Ohio) said.

Rep. Gregg Harper, (R-Miss.) complained of the "political bloodsport to destroy anyone who is affiliated with this administration."

Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas) called Pruitt a "victim" of Washington politics. "If you can't debate the policies in Washington, you attack the personality. And that's what's happening to you."

"I apologize for the abrasiveness of some of my colleagues who would rather tarnish your reputation than address the problems facing the nation," Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.) said after a heated line of questioning from the other side of the aisle.

And as the Huffington Post pointed out, Rep. David McKinley called the criticism a "classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism."

"I have, high, high, high confidence in his personal integrity," Rep. Tom Cole (R-Ok), who comes from Pruitt's home state, added in the second hearing of the day.

In between the hearings, Shimkus told reporters Pruitt's answers were "a little vague" but maintained that only the White House had the power to decide the EPA administrator's fate.

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/republicans-mostly-hold-their-fire-on-scott-pruitt-stand-by-him-in-nod-to-trump
Republicans mostly hold their fire on Scott Pruitt, stand by him in nod to Trump
By Josh Siegel, 4/26/18, 6:40 PM

One Republican apologized to embattled Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt.

“I apologize for the abrasiveness of some of my colleagues trying to tarnish your image,” said Rep. Jeff Duncan, R-S.C., a conservative in the House Freedom Caucus.

Another cleared him of wrongdoing, as more than 10 federal investigations into Pruitt's spending and ethics continue.

“The greatest sin you have committed is you have actually done what President Trump ran on,” said Rep. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., who is running for Senate in his red state and who was Trump's energy adviser during his presidential campaign.

More than a few GOP lawmakers described Pruitt as a victim, blaming his critics for his problems.

“You’re not the first person to be a victim of Washington politics,” said Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas. “That is what is happening to you.”

An old friend from back home was chummy, reflecting on their shared history.

“I have known the administrator for over 20 years and I have high, high confidence in his personal integrity and ability, and certainly if a mistake was made, I'm sure it will be acknowledged and corrected because I’ve seen you do it over and over again over the course of a long and very distinguished career of public service,” said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla.

And many others thanked Pruitt for his work on "saving" coal jobs, rolling back former President Barack Obama's Clean Power Plan and the Waters of the U.S. rule, and promoting "transparency" with his "secret science" rule.

Republicans who questioned Pruitt Thursday during his first testimony on Capitol Hill since a swirl of scandals put his job in jeopardy showed again why the EPA administrator may survive.

Even as some Republicans question Pruitt’s fiscal integrity and judgment, his die-hard supporters — who share the constituents that form Trump’s base — stand by him because he is carrying out Trump's deregulatory agenda.

Perhaps Rep. Evan Jenkins, a Republican from the coal state of West Virginia, best exemplified the competing impulses of a GOP party that prides itself on fiscal discipline but also abhors government regulations that harm industry.

Jenkins, seated next to Pruitt at a conference table in the more intimate setting of the second of two House subcommittee hearings, swiveled his body right and looked the EPA administrator in the eye, thanking him for beginning to roll back Obama-era environmental rules targeting coal-fired power plants.

“Your administration is restoring hope to the people of West Virginia,” Jenkins said during an afternoon hearing held by the House Appropriations interior subcommittee. “I’m not apologizing for any of the actions you have taken with regards to secure communications or travel. Those are issues you will have to be held accountable for and address. The litany of misdeeds [by the prior administration] put us out of business in West Virginia. Today, we are back in business because of this administration. I appreciate the fact you are respecting the rule of law.”

To be sure, Pruitt did not emerge unbruised from his hearings.

“Did he pay a price today? Half the questions were about his stewardship [of the EPA],” Rep. John Shimkus, R-Ill., who is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee that hosted the first hearing, said in a huddle with reporters after it ended.

Shimkus noted that some of Pruitt’s answers to questions were "a little vague."

"It’s never a good idea to blame your staff," he said.

Pruitt opened his morning testimony vowing to "take responsibility" for various ethics and spending accusations, assuring lawmakers he will “make changes.”

But he ended up downplaying his role, often blaming career staff for acting without his knowledge or approval.

The roster of issues under federal investigation include Pruitt’s $50-per-night condo rental deal with the wife of an energy lobbyist who had business before the EPA, his spending of more than $3 million on security, his $43,000 secure phone booth, frequent first-class travel, and allegations that he retaliated against employees who questioned his judgment.

Those problems drew criticism from several Republicans.

“You have not demonstrated the requisite good judgment of an elected official,” said Rep. Ryan Costello, R-Pa., specifically referring to Pruitt’s use of EPA security for personal travel.

“When folks read about trips to Disney or the Rose Bowl, and a security detail related to that, that doesn’t sit well with a lot of people.”

Rep. Leonard Lance, R-N.J., challenged Pruitt about the EPA’s purchase of the $43,000 phone booth for his office, which the Government Accountability Office said violated federal law.

“I do not think it was appropriate, and I think it was a waste of funds,” Lance said. “I am concerned about what I believe is overspending.”

Pruitt replied that he agreed the spending was excessive, but said he did not approve the purchase. He said he would have stopped the transaction if he knew about it.

The EPA administrator later said there is "no truth" to the reports that some EPA employees have faced retaliation after disagreeing with his spending or management decisions.

"I’m not aware of that ever happening," he said.

One Republican was not happy with that answer.

“Even the implication of retaliation can harm morale [at the EPA],” said Rep. Gregg Harper, R-Miss.

When Pruitt’s full day of reckoning was nearly over, Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., ended her questioning as several Democrats before her had, telling Pruitt he should resign.

The few Republicans left sitting around Pruitt at the conference table could be seen chuckling at that unlikely prospect.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/inhofe-reassured-by-pruitts-congressional-testimony-1127258
Inhofe 'reassured' by Pruitt's congressional testimony
By Anthony Adragna, 4/27/18, 12:27 PM

Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) said in a statement today he feels "reassured" about EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's behavior following the two congressional hearings held on Thursday.

"After a full day of mudslinging and partisan questioning from the Democratic members of the committees, it is clear that the only fault they could find with Scott Pruitt is that he's successfully ending the EPA's history of overreach and overregulation," Inhofe said in a statement.

Inhofe, along with multiple other colleagues on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said they favored holding a hearing with Pruitt after a report in the New York Times alleging the EPA chief got a sweetheart deal on an Oklahoma City home while serving in the state legislature. Those allegations were not discussed at length during Thursday's congressional hearings.

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/scott-pruitt-says-courts-struck-down-climate-rules-he-is-repealing
Scott Pruitt says courts 'struck down' climate rules he is repealing
By John Siciliano, 4/26/18, 6:28 PM

Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt said Thursday that the courts had struck down President Barack Obama-era climate rules for coal power plants, despite a midnight Thursday deadline for filing comments on the agency's proposal to repeal those very rules.

"There were two efforts made by the previous administration to regulate CO2, and both of them were struck down by the courts," Pruitt said at an afternoon hearing of the House Appropriations Committee's interior subcommittee.

Rep. Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, fired back, thinking he was talking about fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas rules for cars, known as the CAFE standards.

"CAFE standards were not struck down by the courts," Pingree said.

"That's not the issue we're talking about here," Pruitt said. "The tailoring rule that the previous administration adopted with respect to CO2, and then the Clean Power Plan."

It became clear that Pruitt, Oklahoma's former attorney general, had conflated a Supreme Court stay of the power plan with it actually being struck down. The Clean Power Plan was "stayed by the U.S. Supreme Court," which "was unprecedented," he said.

Although Pruitt and others had read the February 2016 stay as a victory on the merits of the case, the Supreme Court's action did not address any of their arguments. It is still up to the lower D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals to address the actual legal arguments made by 28 states, including Oklahoma.

The D.C. Circuit agreed to hold its ruling in abeyance as Pruitt moves forward with his plan to repeal the regulation, which the EPA is looking to replace with a yet-to-be-determined new rule.

The deadline for submitting comments on the proposed repeal of the plan ends at midnight. Both proponents of repeal and defenders of the climate plan have dumped tens of thousands of comments into the EPA's online docket.

Pingree said the legal status of the rules "doesn't allow us to say we're not going to deal with this issue."

Pruitt fired back, "I haven't said that," explaining that he "can only take the steps that Congress authorizes me to take." He said the fault of the Obama administration was it tried to get around Congress and decide the climate strategy for the U.S. through regulation.

“I have actually introduced an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking in the marketplace to solicit comment on our authority to regulate [greenhouse gas emissions],” he said.

Pruitt will seek to craft a rule through a narrow interpretation of section 111(d) of the Clean Air Act, which governs existing power plant emissions. The Obama EPA used the section to regulate emissions on a state-by-state basis, instead of a plant-by-plant basis. Oklahoma and other states argued in the D.C. Circuit that the interpretation of the law was an illegal overreach. None of that has been settled by the courts.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/epa-delivers-first-batch-of-travel-documents-to-gowdys-panel-1126819
EPA delivers first batch of travel documents to Gowdy's panel
By Anthony Adragna, 4/27/18, 11:48 AM

EPA has delivered copies of travel vouchers of the EPA employees who took overseas trips with Administrator Scott Pruitt to the House Oversight Committee, which expects a second production of documents later today, according to a committee spokeswoman.

EPA is expected to give the panel a "much larger batch of documents" responding to Chairman Trey Gowdy's (R-S.C.) April 13 request later today, spokeswoman Amanda Gonzalez told POLITICO.

Not included in the agency's initial response were travel records for Pruitt's security detail that came along on the trips to Italy and Morocco, though EPA "said they will allow Committee staff to review those documents at EPA, as they are security sensitive," according to Gonzalez.

A senior agency official told POLITICO on Thursday the agency's response to Gowdy's request would show the allegations made by former senior EPA aide Kevin Chmielewski contained "exaggerations" that might mitigate the need for transcribed interviews with four senior EPA aides. Gowdy had requested those aides sit for interviews in his April 13 letter.

Gowdy has been the Republican most aggressively looking into a host of allegations of lavish spending and unethical behavior dogging Pruitt. He requested the documents be provided and interviews scheduled no later than today.

In the most recent letter, Gowdy demanded records related to the decision to increase Pruitt's security to round-the-clock protection, contracts to sweep Pruitt’s office for electronic surveillance, his trips to Italy and Morocco and the hiring of an Italian security firm, among others. He's also been investigating Pruitt's prior first-class travel arrangements and $50-a-night Capitol Hill condo agreement with a Washington lobbyist couple.

E&E News PM
https://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2018/04/26/stories/1060080243
First-class travel became 'distraction' — Pruitt
By Kevin Bogardus, 4/26/18

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt tried to win lawmakers' confidence today with assurances that he's already made changes in response to allegations of pricey travel and security expenses.

Appearing before the House Environment, Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee this afternoon, Pruitt went through a litany of stories about his time at EPA. Asked by Chairman Ken Calvert (R-Calif.) to respond to the charges, Pruitt addressed many directly, saying he wanted to make sure that process is followed at the agency.

"I commit to make those changes prospectively to ensure they are followed in the future," Pruitt said.

The EPA chief said he's no longer looking to fly first class and noted he was flying coach early in his time at the agency. Given the number of threats against him, it was recommended he sit in the front of the plane when he travels.

"That was something that was predicated on a security assessment," Pruitt said on why he flew first class. "That dictated changes in my travel."

The administrator said the media focus on his more expensive flights had become "a distraction" and it was better to return to economy class.

"I recently made changes to that because I felt like from an optics and perception standpoint, it was creating a distraction, and I thought it was best to go in another direction," Pruitt said.

The administrator also said he has taken back pay raises given to two of his aides that attracted scrutiny. Pruitt also said he would have not have gone forward with the installation of a secure phone booth in his office if he was aware of the cost.

"The expenditure of $43,000 on secure communication should not have been made, and I would not have made the decision if I was aware of it," he said.

As he did in this morning's hearing before the House Energy and Commerce Environment Subcommittee, Pruitt again faced criticism from Democrats over various alleged ethical lapses at EPA (Greenwire, April 26).

"Your decisions and actions have displayed a disregard for the ethical standards to which all public officials should adhere," said Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.), the subcommittee's ranking member.

Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), the full committee's ranking member, took issue with President Trump's fiscal 2019 budget plan for EPA of $6.15 billion, which would be a nearly $2 billion cut from the agency's fiscal 2018 funds. She said in turn Pruitt had upped his own costs while looking to cut EPA's budget.

"It is shocking to me that you're not sparing any expense to spend on yourself," said Lowey on his first-class travel and "a glorified phone booth."

Several Republicans stuck to policy questions for this afternoon's hearing. Some, like Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), praised Pruitt for his work at EPA.

Cole said he had high confidence in the administrator.

"I'm sure if a mistake was made that you will correct it accordingly, which you have done over a long and distinguished career," Cole said.

Wall Street Journal
https://www.wsj.com/articles/pruitt-says-attacks-are-driven-by-opposition-to-trump-1524754373?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=2

Pruitt Says Attacks Are Driven by Opposition to Trump
By Heidi Vogt and Louise Radnofsky, 4/26/18, 6:52 PM

WASHINGTON— Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, fought back Thursday against Democratic criticism of his spending and policies, asserting that the attacks were driven by opposition to President Donald Trump's agenda.

In largely partisan House subcommittees hearings, Mr. Pruitt said he recognized the "very troubling reports" on his travel, housing and personnel actions, but that much of what had been reported was twisted. "Let me be clear, I have nothing to hide," he said.

The EPA administrator is under investigation for his spending on office furnishings, personnel moves, travel costs and destinations, security practices and the link between his rental housing in Washington and a lobbyist. The White House, inspector general of the EPA, House oversight committee and Government Accountability Office have been looking at the issues.

Mr. Pruitt, who as the Oklahoma attorney general sued the Obama administration over its environmental policies, was tapped for the EPA post to lead the rollback of regulations Republicans deemed burdensome.

On Thursday, Mr. Pruitt said he reversed course on several of the issues now under investigation when he became fully aware of them or if they became a distraction.

On his first-class air travel, he reiterated it had been dictated by security threats—some of which he read aloud— but subsequently opted to stop it after concluding it was creating a distraction for reasons of "optics."

Challenged about a $43,000 secure phone booth he had installed in his office, Mr. Pruitt said that he had simply told staff he needed a method of secure communication. He said it had been agency career staff members who decided to spend the money and made the judgment it wasn't necessary to notify Congress. He said he wouldn't have made the decision if he had been aware of the cost.

He maintained that he was "not at any time aware" of the amounts involved or the process used to award pay raises that now are under scrutiny as they didn't go through the normal approval process by the White House. He added that when found out the details, he rescinded them

Where Mr. Pruitt was unapologetic, Democrats were unforgiving.

"Your actions are an embarrassment to President Trump and distract from the EPA's ability to effectively carry out the president's mission," said Rep. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) "And if I were the president I wouldn't want your help, I'd just get rid of you."

Rep. Tom Cole, a fellow Oklahoman, said he had high confidence in Mr. Pruitt's integrity and he believed the president's confidence in Mr. Pruitt would remain intact.

"He really performs for the president; that's a presidential decision," Mr. Cole said after the second hearing. "I don't think anything that happened today would undermine that."

Mr. Trump has been supportive of Mr. Pruitt, including publicly, though some administration officials have been more skeptical. On Thursday, an administration official was critical of Mr. Pruitt's performance in the two hearings, but said he probably benefited from attention being directed at Ronny Jackson's withdrawal from the Veterans Affairs secretary nomination and an interview the president gave on Fox News Thursday morning.

"It wasn't necessarily a forest fire—more like a small little burn," the official said of Mr. Pruitt's hearings.

Mr. Pruitt chalked up some of his missteps to a learning curve but said that responsibility for identifying and making changes "rests with me and nobody else," He also said that the criticisms targeted toward him largely stemmed from policies he had pursued.

"They want to attack and derail the president's agenda," he said. "I am simply not going to let that happen."

At both hearings, Republicans came to his defense while Democrats offered sharp-edged critiques of his policy priorities at the agency and Mr. Pruitt's actions.

"You're not sparing any expense on yourself," said Rep. Nita Lowey of New York, who is the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee. That panel's environment subcommittee questioned Mr. Pruitt later on Thursday.

"You have failed as a steward of American taxpayer dollars and our environment," Mr. Tonko said at the earlier hearing.

But Republican David McKinley of West Virginia decried what he called a "classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism" in criticisms of Mr. Pruitt.

GOP Rep. Joe Barton of Texas also said that he believed Mr. Pruitt was being subjected to ad hominem attacks, "a victim, for lack of a better word, of Washington politics."

Where Republicans did address ethical issues, they did so in a relatively friendly fashion.

Mr. Barton asked Mr. Pruitt if his condo lease in Washington, which critics have said was improperly below market rates and had ties to an energy lobbyist, was cleared by his agency's ethics officer, or if he had done anything illegal by flying first class on commercial airliners. Mr. Pruitt said the housing arrangement had been approved twice, and that his travel was also cleared by two teams at the EPA, but that he had subsequently made changes.

Mr. Pruitt emphasized EPA ethics officials cleared his lease. The ethics office has since said it is revisiting the issue. He compared his spending to numerous Obama administration officials to make the argument he has been thrifty, saying many of them had spent more on international travel than he.

A number of Democratic lawmakers asked Mr. Pruitt about the recently proposed rule to require that any study used in shaping EPA regulation must include raw data. Many scientists have panned the move, saying it would exclude much needed research. "This was an effort to ensure transparency," Mr. Pruitt said.

Mr. Tonko asked whether Mr. Pruitt had confidence in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which has criticized the rule. "I'm sure their opinion is credible," he said, but "the actions that we take at the agency are different from their responsibilities."

Politico
https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/26/scott-pruitt-hearing-takeaways-555942
'Embarrassment' or 'McCarthyism': Key moments as Pruitt faces lawmakers
By Quint Forgey, Anthony Adragna, Alex Guillen, and Annie Snider, 4/26/18, 1:40 PM, Updated 5:10 PM

Scott Pruitt, the scandal-ridden administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, appeared on Capitol Hill on Thursday for back-to-back House committee hearings on his agency's budget request.

But the only spending most lawmakers wanted to discuss were reports of Pruitt's taxpayer-funded air travel, the sweetheart condo lease he secured from a lobbyist, and the numerous other allegations of misappropriating funds and unethical management that have tarred his tenure at the EPA.

Here are key moments from the contentious hearings, held by subcommittees of the House Energy and Commerce and House Appropriations committees:

A defiant Pruitt says he has nothing to hide. The former Oklahoma attorney general argued his critics were simply attempting to undercut the "transformational change" he's making at the agency on behalf of President Donald Trump. "Let's have no illusions about what's really going on here: Those who have attacked the EPA and attacked me are doing so because they want to attack and derail the president's agenda and undermine this administration's priorities," he said at the outside of the day's first hearing, in front of a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee. "I'm simply not going to let that happen." Pruitt maintained had "nothing to hide," and and suggested some of the reports regarding his behavior were inaccurate. "Facts are facts and fiction are fiction," he said. "And a lie doesn't become truth just because it appears on the front page of a newspaper."

Pruitt acknowledged he authorized pay raises for his key aides. But he said he didn't know how much they were, or that his chief of staff — who took the blame for signing off on the salary hikes — circumvented the White House to award them. "I was not aware of the amount, nor was I aware of the bypassing or the [Presidential Personnel Office] process not being respected," Pruitt told lawmakers. Pruitt had earlier said on Fox News that he hadn't known about the raises and that the aides should not have received them. A preliminary report from EPA's inspector general found that chief of staff Ryan Jackson signed off on multiple large raises using Safe Drinking Water Act authority, which allows the agency to move forward without White House sign-off. The raises totaled as much as 72.3 percent.

But he blamed EPA's career staff for his $43,000 privacy booth. He said career employees signed off on the expensive soundproof phone booth installed his office — and maintained he would have refused it if he'd known about the cost. "I did have a phone call that came in of a sensitive nature and I did not have access to secure communication," he said. "I gave direction to my staff to address that and out of that came a $43,000 expenditure that I did not approve." The Government Accountability Office has said the agency violated spending laws by not informing Congress about the booth beforehand. To Pruitt's critics, the booth has come a prominent symbol of his reputation for high-spending and extreme secrecy. Pruitt later said he uses the booth only "rarely," and that "it depends on the nature of the call and how urgent the call is."

Pruitt also had trouble explaining the expensive biometric locks recently installed in his office. They require a code for him to enter, but he wouldn't say whether the locks feature fingerprint scanners or some other type of identification system. When Pruitt said career staffers made the decision to install the locks, Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) wasn't impressed. "It's really starting to seem like there's something on the desk with a motto, 'The buck stops nowhere,'" he quipped.

It's still not clear whether one of Pruitt's top aides came to work for three months. "I'm not aware that she did or did not appear for work. So that's something that is being reviewed at this point," Pruitt said of Samantha Dravis, the associate administrator in charge of EPA's Office of Policy. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.) has alleged that Dravis largely did not work the months of November through January, and EPA's inspector general has agreed to review her attendance. Dravis said several weeks ago that she planned to resign, and her last day was reportedly April 20. Pruitt's comments Thursday were a shift from EPA's past statements that the no-show accusation is "completely baseless and absurd."

Democrats pounded him early and often. Those included top Energy and Commerce Democrat Frank Pallone of New Jersey, who said the scandals enveloping Pruitt are "an embarrassment to President Trump and distract from the EPA's ability to effectively carry out the president's mission. And if I were the president, I wouldn't want your help. I'd get rid of you."

Some Republicans also warned Pruitt he needs to answer questions. Environment subcommittee Chairman John Shimkus (R-Ill.) said he considered much of the media narrative surrounding the EPA chief's scandals to be "a distraction," but the committee "cannot ignore" reports of Pruitt's impropriety. "As public servants, our jobs are not based solely on the things we do, or the things we have done, but also on the way we conduct our business," Shimkus said in his opening statement. "It is no secret that there have been many stories in the press about the management and

operations of the agency and your dealings with potentially regulated sectors." And full Energy and Commerce Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) expressed concerns that Pruitt's progress on policy is being "undercut" by the allegations. "These issues are too persistent to ignore," said Walden, a member of House Republican leadership.

But other GOP lawmakers came to his rescue, and one likened the criticism to "McCarthyism." Rep. Joe Barton, a former Energy and Commerce chairman, and Rep. David McKinley (R-W.Va.), a staunch Pruitt ally, blamed Democrats and toxic partisanship for Pruitt's precarious professional standing. "If you can't debate the policies in Washington, you attack the personality, and that's what's happening to you," Barton lamented. McKinley accused Democrats on the panel of not being able to "resist the limelight" and said Pruitt's detractors were simply grandstanding. "I think this has been a lot of classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism that we're seeing too often here in Washington, that I think unfortunately works against civility and respect for people in public office," McKinley said.

Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Ohio) also jumped to shield Pruitt. "I think it's shameful today that this hearing has turned into a personal attack hearing and a shameful attempt to denigrate the work that's being done at the EPA and with this administration," he said. Public officials should have ethical standards "beyond reproach," Johnson said, "but so should members of Congress."

Staffers moved or dismissed under Pruitt weren't being punished, he said. "There's no truth to the assertion that decisions have been made about reassignments or otherwise as far as employment status based upon the things you reference. I'm not aware of that ever happening, and it's something I want to make very, very clear," Pruitt said, vowing he would not retaliate against civil servants who flag wrongdoing. The New York Times reported this month that several top staffers were reassigned or demoted after questioning Pruitt, and POLITICO reported that the agency's deputy homeland security chief was dismissed after signing off on a report questioning Pruitt's security spending.

One Republican ripped into Pruitt with particular gusto. "I think the opprobrium that you've generated on some of these spending decisions is actually warranted," Ryan Costello (R-Pa.), who is retiring from Congress, told the EPA chief. "I've reviewed your answers and I find some of them lacking or insufficient. And I believe you've not demonstrated the requisite good judgment required of an appointed executive branch official on some of these spending items." He went on to ask specifically about reports of retaliation against employees who questioned Pruitt, as well as whether security threats against him were "warranted or credible."

Pruitt: I only took that controversial trip to Morocco because the country's ambassador invited me. "There was a free trade agreement that is in existence with Morocco and the ambassador of Morocco invited me to Morocco to negotiate the environmental chapter on that free trade agreement," Pruitt told lawmakers. The EPA administrator's December jaunt to the North African nation came under intense scrutiny when the agency, in a news release after the fact, described the trip as dual-purpose: to discuss updates to a U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement "and the potential benefit of liquified [sic] natural gas (LNG) imports on Morocco's economy." Later on Thursday, Pruitt attempted to downplay his role in promoting American natural gas exports. "There was a lot of reference made to LNG only because the ambassador [of Morocco] asked me to share that with individuals when I was in country," he said.

Pruitt the leaker? After facing questions about the severity of the threats the EPA chief has faced in office — which the agency has cited to justify his pricey security budget — Pruitt read part of a report from the inspector general's office that documented threats directed at him and his family. Asked whether EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins Jr. had written the report he cited, Pruitt replied, "I'm looking at the document that says inspector general." But a spokeswoman for the IG's office said Thursday that it came from another official, not Elkins himself. "It was an internal memo from Assistant IG for Investigations Patrick Sullivan," OIG spokeswoman Tia Elbaum said in an email. "It was leaked without authorization. It will be released in the near future as part of an OIG FOIA response."

By the time Pruitt was finished, Shimkus was "just glad he showed up." The Illinois Republican, who chaired Pruitt's first hearing, said he thought the administrator handled himself well and that GOP members were suitably tough in their questioning. "Some of it was accountability for policy, so I don't know what more [critics] want," Shimkus told POLITICO of Pruitt's performance. "I think that he answered the questions in the best way that he could answer them." Shimkus declined to speculate about potential next steps the House Energy and Commerce Committee or the Environment

subcommittee would take, and didn't specifically state whether he thought questions remain unanswered after today's grilling. "I knew it would be painful," he said.

Reuters
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-epa-pruitt/grilled-by-u-s-lawmakers-trumps-epa-chief-calls-ethics-scandals-lies-idUSKBN1HX0GQ
Grilled by U.S. lawmakers, Trump's EPA chief calls ethics scandals lies
By Valerie Volcovici, 4/26/18, 1:07 AM, Updated 8:00 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt on Thursday rejected a litany of ethics complaints against him as lies intended to derail President Donald Trump's agenda, and put much of the blame for any agency missteps on his staff.

During two tense congressional hearings, Pruitt faced tough questions from Democrats and even some fellow Republicans in marathon high-stakes testimony as he seeks to avoid becoming the latest in a long list of Cabinet members and senior White House officials to have either been fired by Trump or quit.

"Facts are facts and fiction is fiction," the embattled agency chief told a House of Representatives panel. "And a lie doesn't become true just because it appears in the front page of the newspaper."

"Those who attack the EPA and attack me are doing so because they want to attack and derail the president's agenda and undermine this administration's priorities," Pruitt testified.

The hearings were scheduled to discuss the EPA budget, but mainly focused on Pruitt's performance.

Trump's inner circle has become frustrated by the torrent of news reports about Pruitt including his costly first-class air travel and around-the-clock security, pay raises given to aides and his rental of a room in a high-end Washington condo linked to an energy lobbyist.

Pruitt remained even-tempered and unapologetic throughout more than five hours of testimony, often avoiding being pinned down on specifics or deflecting responsibility for clear missteps onto his staff - a strategy that drew mixed reviews.

It remains to be seen how Trump will view his performance.

"It's never good to blame your staff. If you do it, do it behind closed doors," said Republican Representative John Shimkus of Illinois after the first hearing.

Democrats were more blunt. "You are unfit to hold public office," Representative Frank Pallone of New Jersey told Pruitt.

Democratic Representative Paul Tonko of New York ripped Pruitt for his "seemingly endless misconduct" and "what appears to be a propensity for grift." Democrats also castigated Pruitt for rolling back environmental regulations the Trump administration has said hinder economic growth.

There are nearly a dozen pending investigations of Pruitt's conduct covering a range of allegations. The Government Accountability Office completed one this month that said the EPA violated two laws by installing a $43,000 soundproof phone booth for his office without telling lawmakers first.

Pruitt testified he requested the secure line, but said his staff never told him the cost and that he would not have made the expenditure had he known.

Pruitt has been among Trump's most controversial Cabinet members. He has drawn praise from conservatives and scorn from environmentalists for rolling back Democratic former President Barack Obama's policy to curb greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and other green regulations opposed by industry.

The tumult in the Trump administration was underscored on Thursday when the president's physician Ronny Jackson withdrew from consideration to head the Department of Veterans Affairs amid allegations of misconduct.

Some 170 Democratic lawmakers have demanded Pruitt's resignation. Five Republican lawmakers joined the call in recent days. But several Republicans expressed support for Pruitt at the hearings, praising his EPA accomplishments.

Representative David McKinley of West Virginia called the criticism of Pruitt a "classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism," a reference to a 1950s-era campaign to root out communists.

Fellow Republican Gregg Harper of Mississippi decried the "political bloodsport" of going after Trump administration officials. But Harper, like several Democrats, raised concerns about reports that whistleblowers who brought some of Pruitt's spending issues to light were removed or reassigned.

"There's no truth to the assertion that positions have been reassigned. I'm not aware of that ever happening," Pruitt said.

Republicans Ryan Costello of Pennsylvania and Leonard Lance of New Jersey quizzed Pruitt on EPA spending for his first-class flights - estimated to have cost taxpayers more than $100,000 - and security team.

"I've reviewed your answers and find some of them have been lacking or insufficient," Costello said.

Pruitt said he recently decided to stop flying first-class despite the EPA previously saying it was a necessary measure to protect him from the public. And he justified his 24-hour security team by reciting some of the personal threats he has received. He said the EPA inspector general's office has documented the threats and deemed them "unprecedented."

Pruitt also deflected a flurry of questions about his role in granting big raises to two of his aides - one of them amounting to more than 50 percent - over objections from the White House. Pruitt said he had given his chief of staff authority hand out salary increases without White House approval under an obscure provision of a clean water regulation, but was unaware of any of the other specifics.

Regarding his $50-per-night condo lease from an energy lobbyist's wife, Pruitt said the arrangement received ethics approval and noted that the EPA inspector general's office had found it to be roughly market rate.

The EPA's inspector general's office has since said its review was based on incomplete information, and did not address the question of whether the lease broke other federal ethics regulations.

During the second hearing, Ohio Democrat Marcy Kaptur raised Pruitt's first-class 2017 travels to Italy and Morocco, and questioned why he declined an invitation to visit Ohio to discuss pollution in Lake Erie.

"Do you know how much a flight to Toledo costs?" Kaptur asked.

New York Times

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/26/climate/congress-pruitt-epa-ethics.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FEnvironmental%20Protection%20Agency&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection

Scott Pruitt, on Capitol Hill, Deflects Blame for Ethical Lapses

By Coral Davenport and Lisa Friedman, 4/26/18

WASHINGTON — Scott Pruitt, the Environmental Protection Agency chief, had an easier time than expected on Capitol Hill on Thursday as he deflected Democrats' pointed questions about accusations of ethical infractions and lavish personal spending at the taxpayers' expense.

He insisted that the charges were false and that decisions involving illegal actions had been made by his staff members without his knowledge.

"I have nothing to hide," Mr. Pruitt said. Republicans were largely sympathetic.

His performance, supporters said, may have saved his job and his standing with President Trump.

"It's an audience of one, and Pruitt acquitted himself well," said Frank V. Maisano, a principal at the law firm Bracewell, which represents energy companies that lobby the E.P.A.

Mr. Pruitt, whose job security has appeared perilous recently as allegations of ethical improprieties have increased, gave a restrained performance before two House committees. His responses, however, rarely offered direct answers to questions about accusations of excessive spending or conflicts of interest.

While Democrats, who have called for his resignation, sought to force Mr. Pruitt to accept culpability for a variety of ethical missteps, he denied knowledge of or responsibility for the actions in question. Republicans, after briefly chastising Mr. Pruitt in their opening remarks, asked friendly questions that appeared calculated to allow him to talk about his policy proposals.

As reports about Mr. Pruitt have continued to increase, some White House staff members have urged Mr. Trump to fire the E.P.A. chief. Some Republican leaders have called for his resignation, and many in Mr. Pruitt's own party have called for investigations into his actions. But analysts who watched his performance on Thursday said he did well.

Representative Ken Calvert, Republican of California and chairman of the appropriations subcommittee where Mr. Pruitt testified in the afternoon, called the administrator's appearance "very professional."

Asked if Mr. Pruitt should resign he said, "No."

Ultimately, of course, the only opinion about Mr. Pruitt's fate that matters is the president's.

"I think his effort will be well received by the president," Mr. Maisano said. He has more explaining to do, but it was a good effort to mend fences. There were no lethal blows."

Mr. Pruitt is now the subject of 10 federal investigations, including questions about his office's illegal purchase of a secure phone booth, his condominium rental agreement with the wife of an energy lobbyist, and accusations that he demoted or sidelined E.P.A. employees who questioned his actions.

Committee Democrats queried him sharply about the reports of his ethical lapses and pressed Mr. Pruitt on his rollbacks of environmental rules, in particular, a new policy, proposed this week, that would limit the E.P.A.'s use of scientific research in crafting new health and environmental rules. Scientists have deplored the proposed rule, saying that it would significantly limit the agency's use of rigorous science.

“Administrator Pruitt has brought secrecy, conflicts of interest and scandal to the E.P.A.,” said Representative Frank Pallone Jr. of New Jersey, the ranking Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, where Mr. Pruitt testified Thursday morning. “You are unfit to hold public office and undeserving of the public trust,” he said. “Every indication we have is you really should resign.”

Greg Walden, Republican of Oregon and the chairman of the House Energy committee, offered light criticism before moving on to praising Mr. Pruitt for his efforts to roll back environmental regulations. “I am concerned that the good progress being made on the policy front is being undercut by allegations of your management of the agency and use of its resources,” he said. “These issues are too persistent to ignore.”

Conservative lawmakers from fossil-fuel producing states, who have long pushed for the rollback of E.P.A. regulations, bypassed even slight criticism of Mr. Pruitt, attributing the scrutiny on his actions to a political witch hunt.

Representative David B. McKinley, Republican of West Virginia, told Mr. Pruitt sympathetically that the attacks on him “have an echo of McCarthyism.”

In many ways, the past 14 months of Mr. Pruitt’s tenure has been building to this moment.

As Oklahoma’s attorney general, he made a name for himself aggressively battling the agency he now leads. Mr. Pruitt’s confirmation was fiercely opposed by Democrats, environmentalists and even E.P.A. employees. Since taking the helm of the agency, Mr. Pruitt has worked to strip the E.P.A. of funding, reduce its staff and curb its ability to develop new regulations on fossil fuel pollution.

No E.P.A. director in history has achieved Mr. Pruitt’s level of notoriety. Since the agency was formed, its administrators have been second-tier Washington figures. But Mr. Pruitt’s antagonism toward climate science has made him a nationally-prominent and divisive figure.

Critics said that more than the ethical and spending issues, the real damage to the E.P.A. has been Mr. Pruitt’s systematic weakening of the agency’s ability to protect the environment and public health. While Mr. Pruitt’s performance in Thursday’s hearings may make or break his future within the Trump administration, many said his legacy was already set.

“It’s just been a flagrant, shameless series of calculated decisions to dismantle the country’s most successful domestic enterprise,” William K. Reilly, who led the E.P.A. under the first President George Bush, said of Mr. Pruitt’s leadership. “It’s really a national tragedy,” he said.

At Thursday morning’s hearing, Representative Joe Barton of Texas, who has long denied the overwhelming evidence of human effects on climate change, offered sympathy. “Mr. Pruitt, you’re not the first victim of Washington politics,” he said.

Democrats unsuccessfully sought to pin down Mr. Pruitt on questions about his expenditures, and to force him to accept culpability for some the actions now under investigation.

Representative Tony Cárdenas, a California Democrat, asked about Mr. Pruitt’s soundproof booth, installed in his E.P.A. office at a cost of $43,000. The Government Accountability Office has ruled that the expenditure broke the law.

“I was not aware of the approval of the $43,000,” Mr. Pruitt told him, “and if I had known about it, congressman, I would not have approved it.”

Mr. Cárdenas responded that “if someone was spending $43,000 in my office, I would know about it.”

Representative Diana DeGette, a Colorado Democrat, launched into questions about Mr. Pruitt's involvement in real estate deals in Oklahoma that have been reported in The New York Times, referring to the purchaser of his home as a "shell company."

"It's not a shell company," he said quickly, and added that such financial structures were commonly used to purchase real estate in Oklahoma.

She then asked Mr. Pruitt whether he had paid taxes on rent he received. He said the issue had been handed over to an accountant.

"I'm not doing this to hassle you. I'm doing this as an elected official," Ms. DeGette said as she ended her questions. "Everything we do has to be to the highest ethical standards."

Representative Paul Tonko, the ranking Democrat on the House Energy's subcommittee on the Environment, pressed Mr. Pruitt on his claims that he was unaware that the E.P.A. had used an obscure legal provision to grant hefty raises to political appointees, bypassing approval by the White House. Mr. Pruitt has said the decision was taken by his chief of staff, Ryan Jackson.

"Did you authorize Mr. Jackson to sign those documents for you?" Mr. Tonko asked.

"I was not aware of the amount and I was not aware of the bypassing that was going on," Mr. Pruitt replied.

Even some Republicans criticized Mr. Pruitt for repeatedly blaming his staff.

"If you say give me a phone booth, and your staff does it, you should say, I'm at fault," said Representative John Shimkus, Republican of Illinois, the chairman of the House Energy subcommittee, speaking to reporters after the morning hearing. "It's never good to blame your staff. Or at least do it behind closed doors."

And Representative Anna G. Eshoo, a California Democrat, used her turn at questioning to try to get Mr. Pruitt to accept culpability. "You have a solid record of violating ethics rules from the state level to the federal government," she told Mr. Pruitt. "I think it's an embarrassment." And then she asked, "Do you have any remorse? Yes or no?"

Mr. Pruitt responded: "I think there are changes I've made already. I've made a change from first class to coach travel." Ms. Eshoo returned to her call for a yes-or-no answer, and asked Mr. Pruitt whether he would reimburse the government. He launched into a long response, but she cut him off.

"With all due respect, I may be elected, but I'm not a fool," she said. "This is not 'dodge-question' day."

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2018/04/26/scott-pruitt-braces-for-tough-questions-at-double-hearings-on-capitol-hill/?utm_term=.3a2ff128b3e1
Scott Pruitt admits little culpability in EPA controversies, mostly blames aides and staff
By Brady Dennis and Juliet Eilperin, 4/26/18, 10:37 PM

Scott Pruitt gave little ground Thursday as he testified before two House panels about controversial spending and management decisions he has made while at the helm of the Environmental Protection Agency, blaming aides for exorbitant spending and saying career officials signed off on other controversial decisions.

Bolstered by Republican lawmakers, who praised his push to unravel Obama-era regulations and cut the agency's workforce, Pruitt suggested that the censure he's faced in recent months stems largely from opponents who want to stall President Trump's environmental policies.

"Those who have attacked the EPA and attacked me are doing so because they want to derail the president's agenda. I'm not going to let that happen," Pruitt told members of the House Energy and Commerce environment subcommittee during the morning. "A lie doesn't become true just because it appears on the front page of the newspaper."

Whether Pruitt's composed performance will be enough to preserve his job remains unclear, but there were few signs Thursday that House Republicans were ready to abandon him. Few GOP lawmakers — among them, Rep. Ryan Costello (Pa.), who is retiring, and Rep. Leonard Lance (N.J.), who is locked in a tough reelection fight — criticized Pruitt during more than five hours of questioning.

Three White House officials said Pruitt's testimony — while "not good," in the words of one — did not deliver a knockout blow to his tenure. The EPA chief has little support among senior aides there, and the president has voiced more concern as allegations and investigations involving Pruitt have accelerated. Multiple probes are underway by the agency's inspector general, as well as by the House Oversight Committee, the Government Accountability Office and the White House itself.

Trump did not watch much of the administrator's testimony live, one official with direct knowledge of his schedule said, but will likely view segments later along with media coverage.

Democratic lawmakers pushed Pruitt hard on several fronts, prompting him to concede that he had known in advance of an aide's pay hike, that he had not sought an ethics ruling on his rental of a condo from a lobbyist and that a costly soundproof phone booth installed in his office did not constitute the kind of secure communications facility commonly used by federal officials for classified discussions.

"I'm not afraid to admit that it has been a learning process," he said.

Pruitt repeatedly faulted staff for spending decisions that have drawn intense heat and denied that he had reassigned or demoted anyone who questioned those expenditures. Several people — including Pruitt's former deputy chief of staff for operations, Kevin Chmielewski — have charged that they faced retaliation after challenging plans to spend taxpayer funds on first-class travel, office upgrades and other perks for him.

The EPA chief insisted there was "no truth" to such reports, adding, "I'm not aware of that ever happening."

He also said he had no idea that his request to install a secure phone line in his office would lead to the customized phone booth costing $43,000. "I was not aware of the approval of the $43,000," Pruitt said at one point, "and if I had known about it, congressman, I would not have approved it."

Midafternoon, Pruitt moved over to a House Appropriations subcommittee and was again pressed on how that phone booth came about. The decision to install it "should not have been made," he said.

Referring more broadly to management and spending missteps at the agency, Pruitt told the panel, "If there are processes that have not been followed internally . . . I commit to make those changes prospectively."

He addressed questions about his first-class travel by saying that, even with ongoing security concerns, he had returned this year to flying coach. "I recently made changes to that because I felt like, from an optics and perception standpoint, it was creating a distraction," he said.

He said he was aware of the move to give agency senior counsel Sarah Greenwalt a raise but did not push for it. She and another staffer received significant raises this spring over the objections of officials in the White House Personnel Office. "I was aware of one of those individuals" receiving a raise, Pruitt told Costello.

Greenwalt got a 52 percent increase last month, while Millan Hupp, director of scheduling and advance, got a 33 percent boost. The Washington Post first reported last week that Greenwalt had emailed a colleague in EPA's human resources department that the raises had been "discussed" with the administrator in advance. Each woman had worked for Pruitt in Oklahoma before coming to Washington.

Earlier, when Rep. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) asked Pruitt if he had authorized chief of staff Ryan Jackson to sign the raises, Pruitt had replied, "I was not aware of the amount, nor was I aware of the [Personnel Office] process not being respected." He said he had delegated authority to Jackson to review and approve such personnel actions — a move that was documented by a March 2017 memo the agency released Thursday.

Jackson reversed both raises on April 5, according to EPA documents.

While Costello and Lance bore in on his spending on security and travel, other Republicans lauded his aggressive actions to roll back regulations, most prominently the Obama administration's signature effort to cut carbon emissions from power plants.

"The greatest sin you've committed, if any, is you've actually done what President Trump ran on, won on and what he's commissioned you to do," Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.) told Pruitt during the first hearing.

Rep. Joe Barton (R-Tex.) mounted a defense on Pruitt's behalf. "You're not the first person to be the victim, for lack of a better term, of Washington politics," the lawmaker told him. Referring to the fact that the administrator frequently traveled in first class during his first year at EPA, Barton inquired, "Is it illegal to fly first class?"

Pruitt said that those tickets had been approved by the agency' travel and security offices, prompting Barton to reply, "But it's not illegal. It may look bad, but it's not illegal."

Rep. David B. McKinley (R-WVa.) described the myriad allegations Pruitt faces as "a classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism," adding that he was disappointed his colleagues across the aisle couldn't restrict their questions to ones about policy. "Some just can't resist the limelight, the opportunity to grandstand," he accused.

The EPA's press office issued a news release shortly before the second hearing, with quotes from Pruitt's congressional supporters, including Cramer's comment: "I never cease to be impressed by the level of detail you know."

But Democrats were unsparing in their criticism. Tonko, the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee's top Democrat, delivered a fusillade as Pruitt looked on impassively. After ticking off several allegations about the administrator's personal financial dealings and professional decisions, the lawmaker said, "In almost all cases, the more we have learned, the worse they get."
He concluded by telling Pruitt, "You have failed as a steward of American taxpayer dollars and of the environment."

Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (N.J.), the Energy and Commerce's top Democrat, was even harsher. "You are unfit to hold public office, and you are undeserving of the public trust," he told Pruitt.

Pallone pressed Pruitt on whether he had retaliated against employees who questioned some of his spending decisions. "Has it always been your practice to fire people who disagree with you?" he asked.

Pruitt rebutted the charge. "I don't ever recall a conversation to that end," he said.

The administrator did retreat some during an exchange with Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.). Previously, EPA officials had likened the privacy phone booth to a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) that Pruitt needed for secure conversations with the White House and other officials. A recent GAO report did not assess the booth's security merits but said Pruitt violated federal spending laws by spending more than $5,000 upgrading his office without advance notice to Congress.

The phone booth "is actually not a SCIF," Pruitt said, even as he rejected the GAO's conclusion. He acknowledged that he has only used the booth sparingly. "It's for confidential communications, and it's rare," he added.

At times, he professed to be unfamiliar with some of the technology his aides had installed in his office.

"What is a biometric lock?" Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) asked.

"I don't know," the administrator replied. "I just put a code in."

AP
https://apnews.com/dd43296ebf6c4c3ab851de09dcf78d2e/At-hearings,-EPA-chief-seeks-to-divert-blame-for-ethics-woes
At hearings, EPA chief seeks to divert blame for ethics woes
By Michael Biesecker and Ellen Knickmeyer, 4/27/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt, yet another Trump administration official with his job on the line over ethical concerns, took heat from lawmakers over his profligate spending and lobbyist ties and tried to divert responsibility to underlings.

The EPA administrator said "twisted" allegations against him were meant to undermine the administration's anti-regulatory agenda, and he denied knowing details of some of the extraordinary spending done on his behalf at the agency.

The public grilling at back-to-back House hearings on Thursday, convened to consider EPA's budget, came as support has appeared to erode for Pruitt among fellow Republicans after revelations about unusual security spending, first-class flights, a sweetheart condo lease and more. Even Republicans who heartily support Pruitt's policy agenda said his apparent lapses had to be scrutinized.

Democrats excoriated him.

"You are unfit to hold public office," said Rep. Frank Pallone of New Jersey.

"You've become the poster child for the abuse of public trust," said Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland.

Although most of the Republican lawmakers at the hearings rallied around Pruitt, reviews were mixed. Rep. John Shimkus of Illinois, chairman of the first panel that questioned Pruitt, said afterward the EPA chief was "a little vague," adding, "It's never a good idea to blame your staff in public."

Democratic lawmakers assailed EPA chief Scott Pruitt on Thursday for the ethics and spending scandals that have prompted multiple calls for his ouster. The chairman of the panel that is questioning Pruitt called the allegations a "distraction but one this committee cannot ignore." (April 26)

Asked whether Pruitt should resign, he said that's not his call and suggested it's up to President Donald Trump.

Thursday's hearings were Pruitt's first major appearance since a Fox News interview in early April that was widely considered to be disastrous within the West Wing.

Before Congress, the administrator demonstrated his background as a lawyer, giving clipped answers and sticking to repeating rehearsed talking points.

He visibly bristled as Democrats pressed about the many financial allegations against him, then relaxed when Republicans on the panel gave him openings to expand on his policy steps at EPA.

Mocking Pruitt's opponents, Republican Rep. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota said that as far as the EPA chief's critics were concerned, "I think the greatest sin you've done is you've actually done what President Trump ran on."

"It's shameful that this day has turned into a personal attack," GOP Rep. Bill Johnson of Ohio said.

Trump has stood by his EPA chief, but behind closed doors, White House officials concede Pruitt's job is in serious jeopardy.

Pruitt has faced a steady trickle of revelations involving pricey trips in first-class seats and unusual security spending, including a $43,000 soundproof booth for making private phone calls. He also demanded 24-hour-a-day protection from armed officers, resulting in a 20-member security detail that blew through overtime budgets and racked up expenses approaching $3 million.

The EPA chief acknowledged under sharp questioning that he did, in fact, know something about huge pay raises given to two women on his staff, at least one of them a friend, after insisting weeks ago that he didn't approve the raises and didn't know who did. After his initial denial, documents emerged showing that EPA chief of staff Ryan Jackson signed off on the raises and indicating he had Pruitt's consent.

Pruitt said Thursday he delegated authority to Jackson to give the raises but didn't know the exact amounts. Senior legal counsel Sarah Greenwalt received a raise of more than $66,000, bringing her salary to $164,200, and scheduling director Millian Hupp saw her salary jump from $48,000 to $114,590.

Under questioning, Pruitt appeared to acknowledge that Hupp helped him find accommodations in the capital but said her search apparently did not cost taxpayers. "I'm not aware of any government time being used," he said. "She is a friend."

As he has previously, Pruitt sought to deflect questions about any missteps by blaming subordinates.

—On the communications booth: "I was not involved in the approval of the $43,000, and if I had known about it, Congressman, I would not have approved it."

—On flying first class at taxpayer expense: "Security decisions at the agency are made by law enforcement personnel, and I have heeded their counsel."

—On the pay raises to the two women: "I was not aware of the amount provided or the process that was used in providing that."

At several points, he spoke of decisions made by "career individuals at the agency."

"You're the guy in charge," Democratic Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont countered. "It really seems like there's something on your desk with the motto: 'The buck stops nowhere.'"

Pruitt drew an unusual rebuke from the office of EPA's inspector general, Arthur Elkins, while he was still testifying. A spokesman for Elkins, Kentia Elbaum, said he never signed off on an internal review of security threats that Pruitt cited at the hearing to explain why he needed unusual arrangements for his safety.

Elbaum said the summary was prepared by Patrick Sullivan, an assistant inspector general, and provided to Pruitt's security team but said it was later "leaked without authorization."

Pruitt read aloud from two security threats, one from a man who tweeted that he planned to shoot Pruitt. Investigators determined that the person who wrote the tweet "is currently believed to be living in India."

Democratic Rep. Betty McCollum of Minnesota was unmoved, saying: "We all receive threats on our Facebook page."

The same document Pruitt cited also recounted similar threats against Obama EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, who routinely flew in coach and didn't require full-time protection.

Pruitt's troubles began in earnest last month, when ABC News first reported he had leased a Capitol Hill condo last year for just $50 a night that was co-owned by the wife of a veteran fossil fuels lobbyist whose firm had sought regulatory rollbacks from EPA.

Both Pruitt and the lobbyist, Steven Hart, denied he had conducted any recent business with EPA. But Hart was forced to admit last week he had met with Pruitt at EPA headquarters last summer after his firm, Williams & Jensen, revealed he had lobbied the agency on a required federal disclosure form.

Asked Thursday whether he had received any other gifts from lobbyists seeking favors from EPA, Pruitt replied, "I'm not aware of any instances."

Bloomberg
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-26/pruitt-s-challenge-convince-congress-he-should-keep-epa-job
Pruitt's Capitol Hill Defense: Don't Blame Me
By Jennifer A Dlouhy and Ari Natter, 4/26/18, 4:00 AM, Updated 4/27/18, 4:00 AM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt made it through nearly six hours of grilling on Capitol Hill on Thursday by mostly blaming subordinates for the swirl of ethics allegations that have endangered his tenure.

The EPA chief asserted in back-to-back House hearings that he was not aware of the size of the pay raises that were granted to two top aides over White House objections; didn't ask to fly first-class; and didn't know that the secure phone booth installed in his office was going to cost $43,000.

"If I had known about it, I would not have approved it," Pruitt said when asked about the phone booth.

He stayed calm and lawyerly, managing to avoid any gaffes that could further jeopardize his job. But he didn't appear to win any converts who could aid his political survival. White House officials have cautioned Republican lawmakers and other conservative allies to temper their defense of Pruitt, in a sign administration support for him may be waning.

"It's never good to blame your staff," Illinois Representative John Shimkus, the Republican chairman of the House Energy and Commerce environment subcommittee, told reporters after the hearing. "Or you do it behind closed doors and you talk to them -- but not publicly."

Pruitt, 49, has drawn fire -- and at least nine formal investigations -- for frequent travel to his home state of Oklahoma; questionable spending decisions at the EPA; the raises, which amounted to tens of thousands of dollars; and allegations that some employees were sidelined after questioning his decisions.

Democrats dinged Pruitt for not being able to definitively say whether he had paid taxes on earnings tied to Oklahoma real estate or whether an associate administrator had reliably shown up for work before resigning earlier this month.

"For someone who has been in the job for a year and half, he didn't seem to be in command of a lot of details," Representative Marcy Kaptur, an Ohio Democrat, observed after the afternoon appropriations subcommittee hearing with Pruitt.

Representative Betty McCollum, a Democrat from Minnesota, came right out at the hearing and told him he should resign.

"He could have taken personal responsibility," McCollum said afterward.

Representative Anna Eshoo, a Democrat from California, ticked through the allegations before asking Pruitt: "Do you have any remorse?"

Pruitt cast aside the controversies as "a distraction to our agenda," and called them "half truths, or, at best, stories that are so twisted they do not represent reality."

"Those who attack the EPA and attack me are doing so because they want to attack and derail the president's agenda and undermine this administration's priorities," Pruitt said. "I have nothing to hide with how I ran the agency over the past 16 months."

Pruitt stressed he has made changes in response to some concerns, such as returning to flying coach when his first-class airline travel drew criticism. He said the costlier fares were chosen by security officials concerned about threats against him.

Travel Optics

"I felt like from an optics and perception standpoint it was creating a distraction," Pruitt said, in explaining the downgrade.

Some -- but not all -- Republicans provided a friendlier welcome, with several extolling Pruitt's performance at the EPA, at least one apologizing for colleagues' "abrasive" questions and two casting the deluge of accusations against the administrator as McCarthyism.

"It appears that it has become a political blood sport to try and destroy anybody with the Trump administration," observed Representative Gregg Harper, a Republican from Mississippi.

Representative David McKinley, a West Virginia Republican, said Pruitt had been the target of a "classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism that we're seeing too often here in Washington." Some lawmakers "just can't resist the limelight, the opportunity to grandstand," McKinley said.

Representative Leonard Lance, a Republican from New Jersey, said he was troubled by the allegations of overspending and singled out the phone booth acquisition. The EPA building in Washington already has a secure room where classified information can be shared, so why did we need to spend taxpayer funds on another, Lance asked. "I think it was a waste of funds."

"I gave a simple communication to my leadership team" asking for a secure phone line, Pruitt explained. "It turned into a 40,000-plus expenditure on this phone booth."

From beginning to end, that purchase was handled by EPA career staff, Pruitt said. "Those were all career individuals that were part of that process," Pruitt said.

Some Republicans said Pruitt deftly fielded questions, answering them about as well as he could have. "I think he did fine. I see no reason to change," said Representative Ken Calvert, a California Republican. "We have a committee that is looking into these charges and we'll have a resolution to it."

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/epa-prepping-documents-in-response-to-oversight-probe-1125125
EPA prepping documents in response to Oversight probe
By Anthony Adragna, 4/26/18, 8:11 PM

EPA staff is in the process of providing documents to the House Oversight Committee that it believes will respond to allegations of lavish spending and unethical conduct by Administrator Scott Pruitt and may negate the need for several aides to appear for interviews, according to a senior EPA official.

The agency staffers believe the documents will show former Trump campaign aide Kevin Chmielewski, who served as a senior aide to Pruitt, made a number of "exaggerations" when he spoke with Democratic and Republican lawmakers, according to the official.

Senior staffers at the agency are also willing to sit for interviews with Oversight staff if desired, the official said. Those officials include: Pasquale "Nino" Perrotta, Pruitt's security chief; Ryan Jackson, Pruitt's chief of staff; Millan Hupp, a scheduling and advance aide; and Sarah Greenwalt, a senior counsel to Pruitt.

House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) expanded his probe into the embattled EPA chief's activities one day after his staff sat down with Chmielewski. In an April 13 letter, Gowdy requested a host of documents and that the interviews be scheduled by April 27.

In addition, an Oversight Committee aide said earlier this week the committee had informally requested on April 16 that Samantha Dravis, formerly one of Pruitt's closest aides, appear for a transcribed interview with committee staff. Dravis had not been included in Gowdy's original letter because it was thought she left the agency, but her resignation was actually effective April 20, according to the aide.

A spokeswoman for the Oversight Committee did not respond to request for comment today.

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/27/pruitt-likely-didnt-lie-on-staff-raises/
SCOOP: EPA Memo Suggests Pruitt Did Not Lie To Fox News About Staff Raises
By Michael Bastasch, 4/27/18, 10:43 AM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt told Congress he "delegated" authority over controversial raises to his chief of staff, and some reporters took that as a subtle admission he lied.

However, an EPA memo obtained by The Daily Caller News Foundation shows Pruitt delegated personnel authority to Chief of Staff Ryan Jackson more than one year ago, not around the time of the controversial raises. TheDCNF first revealed the existence of the EPA memo in a Thursday tweet.

Based on the document and Pruitt's testimony, he was not saying he gave Jackson authority to grant the two raises in question.

Democratic lawmakers grilled Pruitt during two hearings on Thursday, including on reports he authorized big salary raises for two close aides over White House objections. Democratic New York Rep. Paul Tonko's exchange with Pruitt got the most attention.

Tonko asked Pruitt for a response to reports in The Atlantic he, or his staff, authorized raises for two staffers who followed the administrator from Oklahoma. The raises were rejected by White House staffers, so EPA used a provision of federal law to go around the oval office.

"Those were delegated to Mr. Jackson and the Inspector General did reference that in his management alert," Pruitt responded to Tonko.

"There were delegations giving him that authority," Pruitt added.

Fox News correspondent John Roberts interpreted Pruitt's delegation of authority to Jackson as "contradicting what he told" Fox's Ed Henry earlier in April.

Pruitt told Henry he'd only found out about the raises given to two staffers when The Atlantic reported on the incident the day before, on April 3. Pruitt also told Henry he did not know who on his staff authorized the pay raises over White House objections.

The Atlantic reported that Pruitt himself approached the White House about the raises for two staffers, the authorized the raises using a provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act after PPO shot him down.

Roberts and others claimed this showed Pruitt changed his story on the raises, essentially lying to Fox News a few weeks earlier.

But the memo obtained by TheDCNF shows he delegated Jackson authority over personnel decisions under the Safe Drinking Water Act in March 2017 — one year before EPA approached the White house about the raises.

The "delegated" authority Pruitt referred to happened months ago, not as the raises for two staffers were being sought, based on the memo.

Jackson later admitted he authorized the pay raises, and EPA's Office of Inspector produced a report showing Jackson did indeed sign off on them "for Scott Pruitt." According to the memo, Pruitt had given Jackson the authority to make such personnel decisions about one year earlier.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/document-epa-reversed-raises-one-day-after-pruitts-fox-interview-1125002
Documents: EPA reversed raises one day after Pruitt's Fox interview
By Emily Holden and Nick Juliano, 4/26/18, 6:45 PM

EPA reversed raises for two top aides to Administrator Scott Pruitt the day after his interview with Fox News, according to documents shared by the agency today.

Pruitt told Fox his staff had authorized the raises and he had "corrected them." A day later, on April 5, Pruitt's chief of staff, Ryan Jackson, signed personnel forms reverting the aides to their previous pay grades, according to copies of the forms reviewed by POLITICO. Jackson signed the documents "for Scott Pruitt," as he had on forms authorizing the initial pay bumps a few days earlier, according to documents previously released by EPA's inspector general.

Sarah Greenwalt, senior counsel to Pruitt, received a $56,765 increase in her annual salary on April 1, and Millan Hupp, director of scheduling and advance, saw a $28,130 increase that same day, according to the earlier IG documents.

Jackson reversed those moves on April 5, bumping Greenwalt's salary back to $109,900 per year, and Hupp's to $88,450, according to the new documents.

Pruitt signed a memo in March 2017 delegating to Jackson the ability to make hiring and salary decisions using a special section of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

"Administrator Pruitt has consistently said he was not aware of the amount of the raises or the process that was used, as he said both today and in prior interviews," EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said in a statement. "He was aware one of the individuals was receiving changes to job responsibilities and might be asking for a raise, but had no further involvement in the discussions, negotiations or approvals, because he had authorized his Chief of Staff and other EPA officials to handle all personnel matters."

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/epa-says-chief-of-staff-had-authority-to-raise-salaries-without-pruitts-review-1123943
EPA says chief of staff had authority to raise salaries without Pruitt's review
By Emily Holden, 4/26/18, 4:18 PM

EPA chief of staff Ryan Jackson has had blanket authorization since the beginning of Administrator Scott Pruitt's tenure to handle hiring and raises under the Safe Drinking Water Act, according to an agency document shared by spokesman Jahan Wilcox.

In a memo dated March 7, 2017, Pruitt delegates to Jackson "the authority to approve all personnel actions for personnel appointed under the Safe Drinking Water Act." According to the memo, Pruitt says he will "retain the right to exercise or withdraw" that authority.

The law has allowed EPA to hire and increase salaries for political appointees without White House consent. Pruitt, under fire after key aides got raises of up to 72 percent, has said he was unaware of the specifics of the salary changes.

He acknowledged to lawmakers on the House Energy and Commerce Environment Subcommittee earlier today that he had delegated authority to Jackson but did not say when.

Pruitt also said staffers were responsible for his $43,000 secure phone booth and biometric locks installed in his office. He said his security team made decisions about his air travel, which has cost at least $163,000, including first-class, charter and military fights.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/mccollum-questions-pruitt-justification-for-security-costs-1123434
McCollum questions Pruitt justification for security costs
By Alex Guillen, 4/26/18, 4:50 PM

Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) questioned the severity of the threats EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has faced in office, which the agency has cited to justify his heavy spending on security.

At a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing this morning, Pruitt cited a report from the inspector general's office that documented threats directed at him and his family in social media posts, emails and letters. The document was first reported earlier this month by CBS.

Later, at Pruitt's second hearing of the day, before a House Appropriations subcommittee, McCollum said the IG's office had disputed Pruitt's characterization of the document and expressed skepticism about the seriousness of its findings.

“We all receive death threats on our Facebook page,” McCollum said after Pruitt read aloud a threat sent to his daughter via social media.

McCollum asked Pruitt whether EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins Jr. had written the report he cited. "I'm looking at the document that says inspector general," Pruitt replied.

But a spokeswoman for the IG's office said today said it came from another official, not Elkins himself.

“It was an internal memo from Assistant IG for Investigations Patrick Sullivan,” OIG spokeswoman Tia Elbaum said in an email. “It was leaked without authorization. It will be released in the near future as part of an OIG FOIA response.”

After the hearing, McCollum said she was disappointed with Pruitt.

“He could have taken personal responsibility and really meant it," she told reporters. "Instead he messed up in that he got caught up in thinking he needed more security than he needed, and that when employees pushed back on him, he did retaliate.”

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/pruitt-distances-himself-from-lng-promotion-on-morocco-trip-1122333
Pruitt distances himself from LNG promotion on Morocco trip
By Anthony Adragna, 4/26/18, 3:38 PM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt today downplayed the role promoting liquefied natural gas exports played in his December trip to Morocco, saying he was there for negotiations over the environmental chapter of a free trade agreement with that country.

While EPA at the time described the purpose of the trip as twofold, Pruitt told members of Congress today that promoting LNG was not his idea.

"There was a lot of reference made to LNG only because the ambassador [of Morocco] asked me to share that with individuals when I was in country,” Pruitt told Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) at an Appropriations subcommittee hearing, his second appearance on Capitol Hill of the day.

EPA did not announce Pruitt's trip in advance, but a press release announcing it after the fact said he discussed both the trade agreement and "the potential benefit of liquified [sic] natural gas (LNG) imports on Morocco's economy.”

Critics argue the trip fell well-outside the portfolio of the EPA administrator.

"I can’t for the life of me imagine why an EPA administrator would be over there promoting energy sales,” Pingree said. "We have a Department of Energy."

Washington Examiner
https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/scott-pruitt-blames-ambassador-for-talking-up-energy-exports-in-morocco
Scott Pruitt blames ambassador for talking up energy exports in Morocco
By John Siciliano, 4/26/18, 4:17 PM

Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt downplayed his trip to Morocco last year, saying the only reason he discussed natural gas exports there was because he was asked to by the Moroccan ambassador to the United States.

The primary purpose of the trip was to hash out the environmental component of a free-trade deal the U.S. finalized with Morocco in February, he said at a hearing Thursday afternoon before the House Appropriations Committee's interior subcommittee.

“There is a free-trade agreement, the ambassador of Morocco actually met with me in advance of the free-trade agreement that was being negotiated and completed in February of this year," Pruitt explained, after being prodded by Democratic Rep. Chellie Pingree of Maine on why an EPA chief would be promoting fossil fuels in another country.

"We were there in December to defend the environmental chapter” of the trade deal, Pruitt said. The EPA inspector general is investigating the trip's costs, which amounted to $40,000.

The inspector general's office added the Morocco trip to a previous investigation it was undertaking on Pruitt's lavish domestic travel and security costs in response to a letter by Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, the top Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee. Carper also asked the EPA watchdog to probe the focus of Pruitt's trip and his focus on liquefied natural gas exports from the United States.

“Well, it's certainly been portrayed in another way and its certainly raised a lot of concerns," Pingree said after hearing Pruitt's response. "I would not like to think that you were promoting fossil fuels or fossil fuel sales outside the country.”

The EPA issued a press release on Dec. 12, after his visit, that stated that he was in Morocco to outline "U.S. environmental priorities for updating the environmental work plan under the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement and the potential benefit of liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports on Morocco’s economy. "

Some media reports have noted that the energy lobbyist whose wife Pruitt rented a Capitol Hill condo from was a lobbyist for Cheniere Energy, a top exporter of LNG.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/385065-ig-threat-memo-cited-by-pruitt-isnt-from-ig
IG: Threat memo cited by Pruitt isn’t from IG
By Timothy Cama, 4/26/18, 4:13 PM

The Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Office of Inspector General (OIG) pushed back Thursday against EPA head Scott Pruitt, saying he misrepresented a memo about the threats against him in testimony to the House.

In two separate hearings Thursday, Pruitt presented to lawmakers a “threat assessment” that he said came from Inspector General Arthur Elkins detailing various death threats against him.

He used the memo to justify his security costs, including the purchase of first-class airline tickets and the employment of a 24/7 security detail.

But the OIG says the document wasn't from Elkins.

"The memo that he read from was not from Inspector General Elkins. It was an internal memo from Assistant IG for Investigations Patrick Sullivan," OIG spokeswoman Kentia Elbaum said in a statement.

"It was leaked without authorization," Elbaum said, adding that the OIG plans to release it soon in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

Elbaum's statement described Pruitt as "waving a document he said was from the Inspector General."

At the afternoon hearing with the House Appropriations Committee's subcommittee with authority over the EPA's budget, Rep. Betty McCollum (Minn.), the subpanel's top Democrat, repeatedly asked Pruitt whether the document was from Elkins.

"The document says 'inspector general,'" Pruitt replied. He similarly claimed earlier to the House Energy and Commerce Committee that the inspector general wrote the report.

Sullivan has told multiple news outlets that Pruitt has gotten far more death threats than previous EPA administrators.

"We have at least four times — four to five times the number of threats against Mr. Pruitt than we had against Ms. [Gina] McCarthy," he told CNN.

The New York Times reported this month that Sullivan was spotted drinking at a bar near the EPA's headquarters with Pasquale "Nino" Perrotta, the head of Pruitt's security detail and the impetus behind much of Pruitt's high-level security.

That spurred Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington to ask that the OIG look into their relationship and whether Sullivan should be involved with investigations involving Pruitt or Perrotta.

ABC News
http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/amid-reports-misconduct-pruitt-faces-house-panels-live/story?id=54747126
Highlights from Pruitt's marathon day on Capitol Hill
By Stephanie Ebbs and Lucien Bruggeman, 4/26/18, 7:53 PM

Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt insisted he has "nothing to hide" and shifted blame for some of the agency's spending decisions to staffers during six hours of grilling on Capitol Hill Thursday.

Asked how the White House viewed Pruitt's performance, one administration official told ABC News that he still "has no support in the building except from the president."

Some Republicans defended Pruitt, saying that Democratic critics were trying to shoot the messenger and that he was a victim of "Washington politics" while Pruitt himself said some of the accusations of ethical misconduct were just untrue.

Pruitt faced an array of questions about his decisions to roll back environmental policies since taking over the agency, whether he granted controversial raises to two of his aides and the cost of his security detail and travel.

Pruitt had addressed some of the allegations and ongoing investigations in a Fox News interview that aired earlier this month but Thursday was the first time he was questioned about reports that he retaliated against EPA employees that

expressed concerns about his spending at the agency as well as claims from an EPA whistleblower, described in a letter from Democrats, that his security detail exaggerated threats against him to justify increased spending and first-class seating on flights.

Pruitt appeared before a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee Thursday morning and then before a House Appropriations subcommittee in the afternoon.

Here are some highlights from the two hearings.

A member of the House Appropriations subcommittee raised questions about one of Pruitt's trips abroad, a recent visit to Morocco during which Pruitt promoted U.S. natural gas exports – typically within the Energy Department's purview.

"I can't for the life of me imagine why an EPA administrator would be over there promoting energy sales," Rep. Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, said.

Pruitt defended the trip as a preliminary meeting for the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement where "there was a lot of reference to LNG" – shorthand for liquefied natural gas – "only because the ambassador asked me to share that with individuals while I was in country."

It wasn't immediately clear which ambassador Pruitt was referring to.

ABC News has previously reported that Pruitt recorded only one meeting on the first day of the costly trip to the Saharan country.

An initial agenda for the trip reviewed by ABC News included four redacted pages.

The afternoon hearing began much in the same way as the Energy and Commerce subcommittee's morning hearing ended, with Democratic ranking member Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., holding Pruitt's feet to the fire about security and travel expenditures.

As Pruitt read aloud threats made against him – referring to a document he says was provided to him by the EPA's inspector general – in an effort to justify higher security costs – McCollum pushed back, telling Pruitt that "we all receive death threats on our Facebook page."

McCollum revealed that the committee reached out to the EPA's inspector general ahead of the hearing and said the inspector general, Arthur Elkins, "disputed" some of Pruitt's claims.

Pruitt insisted the document was from the inspector general, and McCollum asked that the document be submitted for the hearing's official record.

When ABC News reached out to the inspector general's office, a spokesperson confirmed Rep. McCollum's assertion that Elkins disputed Pruitt's claim.

"The memo that [Pruitt] read from was not from Inspector General Elkins," a spokesperson for the inspector general said, adding, "It was an internal memo from Assistant IG for Investigations Patrick Sullivan. It was leaked without authorization. It will be released in the near future as part of an OIG FOIA response."

After nearly four hours of questioning, the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing ended the way it began, with exasperated Democratic lawmakers peppering Pruitt with questions about reports of unethical behavior and lavish spending – and criticizing Republicans on the panel for refraining from doing so.

Asked whether he has any remorse for what Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., called "excessive spending," Pruitt said he's already made changes, citing his decision to fly in coach after reports emerged that Pruitt flew in first class.

"This is not a dodge question day… I don't really find you forthcoming," Eshoo added.

Vermont Democrat Peter Welch again questioned Pruitt about the purchase of a $43,000 soundproof phone booth, pointing to the two secure spaces already within the EPA to communicate sensitive information.

Pruitt reiterated that his staff coordinated the purchase of the secure phone booth, adding that the two other secure spaces are "not that close to my office."

With regard to his chain of command and delegating the phone booth purchase to staff, Pruitt conceded that "in this instance, the process failed."

In the waning moments of the hearing, Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Fla., expressed disappointment in her Republican colleagues for letting Pruitt "off the hook" by avoiding questions about his conduct.

"It's embarrassing that most of the Republicans refuse to take this committee's oversight responsibility seriously," Castor said.

Pruitt shifted blame onto "career EPA officials" for erecting a private phone booth in the administrator's office that cost more than $43,000.

"I did not have access to secure communications, I gave directions to my staff to address that," Pruitt said, adding that staffers had "made expenditures that I did not approve."

The EPA spent more than $43,000 to install a "secure phone booth" in Pruitt's office last year, according to agency documents obtained by American Oversight, a watchdog group founded by former Obama administration officials.

Pruitt confirmed that the phone booth was not certified as a SCIF – a facility used for secure communications to discuss classified information. The EPA already two SCIFs elsewhere in its headquarters, according to the GAO report.

Earlier this month, the Government Accountability Office found that the EPA violated federal law by failing to notify Congress before spending more than $5,000 on the phone booth.

In a letter to the GAO, the EPA also argued that spending on the booth did not need to comply with the appropriations law because it was not an "aesthetic improvement," but an expense to facilitate agency business. A decision by EPA's general counsel disagreed with that finding, saying that it was a functional improvement and not just aesthetic.

Pruitt said the EPA is investigating that matter internally.

Pruitt told the committee that he gave a top aide permission to give at least two EPA employees big raises, deviating from how he characterized authorization for these raises in the past.

A report from the EPA's internal watchdog found that it was Pruitt's chief of staff, Ryan Jackson, who signed off on raises for 30-year-old senior legal counsel Sarah Greenwalt and 26-year-old scheduling director Millian Hupp under a little-known provision of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Thursday, Pruitt confirmed that he delegated that authority to Jackson.

In an interview that aired on Fox News earlier this month, Pruitt said he didn't know anything about the raises and that he has taken action to reverse the decision.

ABC News previously reported that two sources confirmed Pruitt pushed for the raises of two staffers but has not confirmed the amounts paid to these employees.

A small number of protesters wielding signs in the hearing room gallery disrupted the hearing.

Environmental subcommittee chairman Rep. John Shimkus stopped a line of hearing to address the protesters, warning them to remain quiet or get kicked out.

Protesters quieted when Capitol Police officers approached the gallery.

The Energy and Commerce Committee's ranking member, Rep. Frank Pallone, D.N.J., called Pruitt's conduct in office "an embarrassment" when referring to reports that Pruitt has acted in retaliation against EPA officials who disagreed with his agenda or questioned the legitimacy of threats against the administrator.

In response to Rep. Pallone's line of questioning, Pruitt said he did not recall taking retaliatory action against aides.

But the committee's vice chairman, Rep. Joe Barton. R-Texas, defended Pruitt, saying that he's a victim of "Washington politics," and Rep. David McKinley, R-W.Va., scolded his Democratic colleagues for "grandstanding" and engaging in "McCarthyism" by attacking Pruitt over news reports.

In the second hearing of the day a Republican from West Virginia, Rep. Evan Jenkins, said that the EPA's decisions under Pruitt and President Donald Trump have brought his state "back to life."

"When you don't like the message, you shoot the messenger," Jenkins said.

Administrator Pruitt addressed the slew of media reports directed at his conduct as agency chief in opening remarks to the committee.

"I recognize there have been very troubling media reports over the last few weeks," Pruitt said, deviating from the prepared remarks released by the Committee on Wednesday. "I promise you that I, more than anyone, want to address the questions surrounding these reports."

Pruitt called the media reports an attack on the administration and an effort to derail the agency's agenda.

"A lie doesn't become truth just because it's on the front page of the newspaper," Pruitt said.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/385105-five-takeaways-from-pruitts-day-of-testimony
Five takeaways from Pruitt's big testimony
By Miranda Green and Timothy Cama, 4/26/18, 7:17 PM

Scott Pruitt, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), faced a barrage of tough questions from lawmakers Thursday as he testified in front of two House committees.

Pruitt, who has been embroiled in controversy for weeks, fought back aggressively against his critics and dismissed the negative headlines about his tenure as "fiction."

Here are five takeaways from his big day on Capitol Hill.

He escaped disaster.

Pruitt testified for nearly six hours, a grueling task for any Cabinet member, and seemed to mostly escape unscathed.

The hearings lacked fireworks, even as Democrats took turns excoriating the EPA chief and, in some cases, calling for him to resign.

Pruitt came prepared to answer questions about his spending and other ethics controversies. He tackled reports of his costs head-on in his opening statement, blaming the media for taking attention away from his regulatory work.

“Facts are facts and fiction is fiction. A lie doesn't just become the truth because it’s on the front page of a newspaper,” Pruitt said in both of his opening statements.

The former Oklahoma attorney general appeared to have an answer prepared for every question thrown at him, ranging from his use of a privacy booth to his spending on his round-the-clock security team to raises approved for EPA staffers.

Pruitt didn’t once raise his voice or appear to be frazzled by the round of at times rapid-fire questions thrown at him.

But by the final panel, lawmakers appeared to run out of steam, at times referring, and yielding, to answers Pruitt gave at the day’s earlier hearing.

If any lawmakers were expecting apologies or contrition from Pruitt, they didn’t get it.

Pruitt shifted blame for the controversies at the EPA to other people, including for his use of first-class travel, his unauthorized staff raises, his construction of a privacy booth and his use of a 24/7 security detail.

Speaking in the afternoon to lawmakers on the House Appropriations Committee subpanel, Pruitt said he decided to change from flying coach to first-class due to threats against his life.

Pruitt cited two examples written in a leaked memo from the deputy inspector general as to why his around-the-clock security team was necessary. Two members of his security team sat directly behind him in the hearing room during the testimony, one wearing an earpiece.

The administrator suggested that he no longer flies first-class, calling news surrounding it “a distraction.” He said he made a change.

On the agency’s approval to provide substantial pay raises to two EPA staffers who had moved from Oklahoma with Pruitt — one who Pruitt described at the earlier hearing as a “close friend” — the chief said he was not aware of the type or amount of the raises. He admitted, however, that he was aware of the raises, contradicting what he’d previously said in an interview to Fox News.

Pruitt said after media reports surfaced, he directed his chief of staff, Ryan Jackson, to stop the raises. Jackson has previously taken responsibility for the pay increases. The EPA released a document during Pruitt’s hearings that showed the administrator had in March 2017 transferred authority to Jackson to hire employees under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Pruitt also asserted that he was not aware of the nearly $43,000 cost of a privacy booth installed in his office last year. He said he had mentioned to staff not being able to take a phone call securely, but did not sign off on the booth and blamed “career staffers” who were involved “from the beginning to the end.”

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) last week found that the privacy booth's construction yielded a number of violations.

Pruitt pledged to ensure that the EPA avoids further missteps.

“My objective to speak with you today is to provide confidence, and recognize faults where they have occurred and make sure they don't happen in the future,” he said.

It wasn’t all a walk in the park for Pruitt when it came to questioning from Republican lawmakers. While many focused their questions on policy decisions, others offered up harsh criticism over proposed EPA budget cuts that would gut or severely diminish a number of key programs in their states.

Rep. Ken Calvert (R-Calif.) opened the Appropriations Committee hearing by sharply criticizing Pruitt’s proposal to cut around 25 percent from the EPA’s budget.

“While some reductions may be in order, cuts of this magnitude put important programs at risk,” the chairman of the subcommittee said, pointing to eliminations or cuts the Trump administration is proposing to state grants, programs to clean up major waterways and grants to clean up diesel pollution.

For those lawmakers who did venture to question Pruitt about the controversies, they focused on his spending.

Rep. Ryan Costello (R-Pa.) expressed concerns over the costs of Pruitt’s security detail.

“When folks read about trips to Disneyland, professional basketball games, the Rose Bowl, and the additional security detail related to that, that doesn’t sit well with a lot of people,” Costello said.

Costello, who is leaving Congress after this year, said he thought the EPA chief lacked “good judgment.”

“I believe you’ve not demonstrated the requisite degree of good judgment required of an appointed executive branch official on some of these spending items.”

Rep. Gregg Harper (R-Miss.) asked Pruitt to promise that he would take whistleblower concerns seriously.

“Assure me and employees of EPA that all whistleblower complaints will be taken seriously at EPA,” Harper asked Pruitt.

Pruitt responded: “This is not one of those situations, but absolutely that is something I can commit to you and will commit to you.”

Numerous Republicans rushed to Pruitt’s defense, not just applauding him for his work at the EPA, but portraying him as the victim.

Rep. David McKinley (R-W.Va.) called the Democrats’ rhetoric “a classic display of innuendo and McCarthyism that unfortunately ... I think works against civility and respect.”

“I’m hoping we would be able to stay on policy as much as we could, but some, I see, just can’t resist the limelight, the opportunity to grandstand,” he added.

Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas) said it was another case of “Washington politics.”

“Republicans do it when it’s a Democratic president, Democrats do it when it’s a Republican president,” he said.

Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.) apologized to Pruitt.

“I apologize for the abrasiveness of some of my colleagues who would rather tarnish your character than really try to delve into the issues facing this great nation.”

Some of his statements could come back to haunt him

Pruitt made a number of statements that contrasted with his past statements and those of others.

For example, Pruitt testified that he knew about controversial raises given to two close aides, but said he didn't know the amount nor that his chief of staff bypassed White House procedures to approve them.

Pruitt previously told Fox News's Ed Henry during a combative interview that he didn't know about the raises and that it was all done by a member of his staff without his knowledge.

In another instance, defending his security detail, Pruitt quoted the text of a letter that he said was an official "threat assessment" from the inspector general's (IG) office. And he stayed by his claims, despite questioning from Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) about whether the letter did come directly from EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins.

Elkins's office has since disputed that, saying the letter Pruitt used was instead from Patrick Sullivan, the assistant inspector general for investigations. The office also said the letter was leaked without authorization.

Pruitt also said he did not sign off on the $43,000 soundproof booth installed in his office, nor did he know its cost.

"Career individuals at the agency took that process through and signed off on it all the way through," Pruitt told Rep. Tony Cárdenas (R-Calif.). "I was not involved in the approval of the $43,000, and if I'd known about it, congressman, I would have refused it."

The White House Office of Management and Budget and the EPA's IG are both looking into the booth purchase.

"If something happens in my office, especially to the degree of $43,000, I know about it before, during and after," Cárdenas said.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/385134-christine-todd-whitman-scott-pruitt-is-unfit-to-run-the-epa
Christine Todd Whitman: Scott Pruitt is unfit to run the EPA (*Op-Ed)
By Christine Todd Whitman, 4/27/18, 7:30 AM

Scott Pruitt's ethical tone deafness has, ironically, come across loud and clear. The rule he signed this week targeting what he called "secret science" serves as yet further evidence of his inability to run the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with ethical integrity. In fact, the new rule is a surefire way to kill science at the agency as it de-incentivizes the private sector to share proprietary studies with the EPA.

This may sound counterintuitive and does not fit within the sound bite media culture in which we currently find ourselves. By touting "transparency" at the agency, the untrained observer might think he was doing something good for the future of the EPA and by extension, human health and the environment. But proprietary studies and scientific data from the private sector act as a balance for the agency's scientific data. The EPA needs these studies to prove or disprove its own hypotheses and establish sound, well-informed regulations.

Regulations from the EPA are not based on politics (though I'd argue that Pruitt's term as administrator has varnished the EPA in political bias). On the contrary, regulations from the EPA are rooted in science, and the agency needs sound scientific data — including proprietary studies — to make informed decisions and enact regulations that protect the environment and human health.

Pruitt's proposed rule — requiring the EPA to publish the underlying scientific data used to support the studies that inform the agency's clean air and clean water regulations — unleashes a host of issues. The rule will compromise patient privacy with regard to medical studies, and private sector companies will be deterred from sharing proprietary studies with the agency.

Most importantly, the EPA won't be able to come forward with new regulations because they won't have enough data. And that's just what the administration wants. No new regulations. This idea of "open science" will actually shut down science. This rule will turn the agency on its head and render it completely ineffective, which poses an extraordinary threat to science, to the environment, and to human health at large. Contrary to what the current administration might like us to believe, the EPA's regulations aren't just red tape for businesses and industries; they're enacted to protect the health of our citizens.

This new rule is just one of the many sound policies that Pruitt has dismantled as administrator of the EPA. He has revised authority for the Clean Water Act — taking what was previously in the hands of regional EPA administrators and consolidating in his office. He rolled back the Clean Power Plan, which was also aiming to reduce the very pollution that harms our most vulnerable citizens in particular. He lifted fuel economy and emissions standards that keep cars from further polluting our air. Pollution kills three times more people than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis put together and yet Pruitt is making it easier for automakers to pollute and American citizens to get sick.

In addition to his policy dismantling, Pruitt's ethical lapses not only make him a questionable spokesperson, but also a detriment to the agency. His private phone booth creates an atmosphere of distrust. He sequesters himself, interacting only with a select group of people, and he doesn't engage with staff. On one hand, Pruitt touts "open science" and on the other hand he fosters an environment of secrecy and distrust. Even the "secret science" rule was announced while limiting access to reporters and scientists at the event.

Scott Pruitt is unfit to run the EPA because he lacks ethical integrity — a quality that is of the utmost importance when entrusted with protecting the environment and public health.

Christine Todd Whitman is the former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under President George W. Bush. She previously served as the governor of New Jersey and now runs her own consulting firm.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/opinions/wp/2018/04/27/scott-pruitts-feisty-defense-of-himself-may-have-been-good-enough-to-save-his-job-of-destroying-the-earth/?utm_term=.455af6fd9efe
Scott Pruitt's feisty defense of himself may have been good enough to save his job of destroying the earth! (*Op-Ed)
By Tom Toles, 4/27/18, 8:55 AM

There are times when what you are watching is so far out of line with what is actually happening and what actually matters that you know that somebody is screamingly bonkers.

Watching the testimony of Environmental Protection Agency Executioner Scott Pruitt yesterday was one of those times, although "those times" are just about "all the time" these days. Here you had a hours-long examination of the top environmental official in which the largest environmental crisis of human history is not the subject. The United States has removed the "environ" part of this environmental case, leaving just a mental case.

Pruitt deflected blame. Booyah. Deflected so well he may have saved his job. Huh? Is this really the story? The ceaseless pouring of a gas into the atmosphere that is known and recognized by all the world's scientists to be putting catastrophe squarely in the path of humanity's future, and we're doing a fine calibration of how effectively one of the principal bad actors deflected blame in a minor tawdry bit of official corruption? Hey, Trump likes a combative attitude! Pruitt scored some points for himself! Stop it! Please, just please make this stop!

The United States is pathetic. Just pathetic. The rest of the world watches us the way one watches a multi-car pileup to see our indulgence of infantile, make-believe posturing, diversion, evasion and lies that nobody believes. Foreign leaders come here and see how best to baby-talk to our baby-king. Does he like flattery? Holding hands? Don't make him too angry!

Congress is pathetic. The media, to the degree that we don't headline the climate disaster until we address it, is pathetic.

When does this bad dream end? It's about a half-year now until November.

Tom Toles is the editorial cartoonist for The Post and writes the Tom Toles blog. See all of his cartoons here.

Washington Post
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/robert-redford-the-biggest-scott-pruitt-scandal-is-the-one-right-in-front-of-us/2018/04/26/849085f0-498c-11e8-8b5a-3b1697adcc2a_story.html?utm_term=.6c7b0f200235
Robert Redford: The biggest Scott Pruitt scandal is the one right in front of us
By Robert Redford, 4/26/18, 7:36 PM

Robert Redford is an actor, director, producer and trustee of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

President Trump should follow the suggestion of many — including some within his own party, and reportedly even his chief of staff — and replace Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt.

Pruitt's conduct as head of the EPA is beyond disappointing; it's disgraceful. The list of indefensible actions grows each week: from sweetheart condo deals with the wife of an energy lobbyist, to unfair raises for favored appointees and apparent punishments for those who defy him, to a $43,000 soundproof phone booth.

These seemingly daily revelations dominate the headlines. But Pruitt's failings in ethics and judgment are only part of a much larger problem: Pruitt has failed at the core responsibility of his job.

He's not protecting the environment. Pruitt has become a one-man public-health risk to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. From day one, he has worked to gut the EPA and hamstring its ability to protect the environment and public health. He works on behalf of the fossil-fuel industry and other industrial polluters, not the American people. That's the greatest scandal — and the reason, first and foremost, he's got to go.

And he actively promotes one of the gravest threats to our future — misinformation. To hear Pruitt tell it, the rising seas, widening deserts and raging wildfires Americans are experiencing are reasons to debate the science on climate change, not take action against it.

Pruitt led Trump's charge to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Paris climate accord. I was in Paris when that agreement was reached. It was a triumph of American leadership. We were doing what was best for our country: cutting carbon pollution today so our kids would have a more predictable climate and a better future. The Trump administration has broken our promise to the world by announcing that we will back out of the Paris accords.

Unfortunately, that's not all. Pruitt has been working to weaken standards designed to clean up dirty power plants and to walk back fuel standards for cars. He has put a hold on vital safeguards that would limit the amount of mercury, arsenic, lead and other toxic chemicals that industry can spew into the air or dump into our rivers. Speaking of water, he's working to repeal the clean water rule that ensures protection for wetlands, rivers and streams that provide drinking water to a third of all Americans.

Meanwhile, he has ignored research from scientists at the agency and refused to ban dangerous chemicals, such as the pesticide chlorpyrifos. Instead, he hired a lobbyist connected with one of the manufacturers of the chemical and then reduced fines levied against the company for violating regulations.

He also attacked science itself, proposing policies in the guise of transparency that would limit the research that the agency could use to make decisions.

Americans deserve better. The EPA was established to protect the environment and public health for everyone. It's something America got right, and it is up to us to defend it.

Pruitt should be replaced by a principled leader who will do what the EPA was intended to do: protect America from men such as Pruitt.

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/26/scott-pruitt-inconvenient-truth-obama-carbon-emissions/
Pruitt Points Out 'An Inconvenient Truth' About Obama's Attempts To Regulate Carbon Emissions
By Tim Pearce, 4/26/18, 4:51 PM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt pointed out a seldom discussed issue on Wednesday with former-President Barack Obama's climate policy.

Pruitt sat before the House Committee on Appropriations to defend the EPA's 2019 budget Wednesday afternoon after getting grilled in another hearing that morning. Democrat Rep. Chellie Pingree questioned Pruitt's stance on climate change and rebuked the EPA administrator for rolling back regulations intended to cut carbon emissions.

In the debate on carbon regulations, arguments over economics and the fate of the world usually take the forefront. Emissions regulations overly burden businesses and are less effective than market-driven technological advancement, Republicans generally argue. Democrats tend to stress the need for action to combat climate change and protect the Earth from irreparable harm from severe weather events and rising oceans.

During a line of questioning from Pingree, Pruitt took a different tact. He focused on the process through which the EPA enacts regulations and the extent of the EPA's authority.

Early in the exchange, Pingree began reading letters from children in her district lamenting their futures if climate change continues unabated. One child said his family tradition of camping out and eating lobster on one of Maine's islands would soon be impossible because of climate change.

"If the oceans keep warming and pushing lobsters north, there will most likely not be the same island culture that there is today," Pinegree quoted. "Lobster fishermen will be replaced by tourists, and there will be no reason for me to return to the island with my children."

"That might be through the eyes of children; but if you're not going to listen to scientists, who are you going to listen to?" The congresswoman asked.

"What's lost in this discussion is what authority does the EPA have to regulate," Pruitt said.

"There were two efforts made by the previous administration to regulate CO2, and both of them were struck down by the courts," Pruitt continued. "The tailoring rule that the previous administration adopted with respect to CO2 and the

Clean Power Plan was stayed by the U.S. Supreme Court, and it was unprecedented. That had never happened for the U.S. Supreme Court to issue a stay while a case was pending at a lower court level."

"That does not allow us to say we are not going to deal with this issue," Pinegree responded.

"I can only take the steps that Congress authorizes me to take," Pruitt said, faulting the Obama administration for trying to "pinch-hit" for Congress.

The congresswoman followed up, saying what was done in the past is irrelevant to the present, and she wanted action from Pruitt. Pruitt has made statements in the past regarding climate change, she also pointed out and took issue with what those implied about the action(s) he would take to combat it going forward.

E&E Greenwire
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060080343/search?keyword=EPA
New Source Review rulemaking possible — Pruitt
By Sean Reilly, 4/27/18

EPA is contemplating an overhaul of its perennially contentious New Source Review permitting program, Administrator Scott Pruitt said yesterday.

"What we want to do is provide clarity," Pruitt told Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Ohio) at the hearing of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment. "Overall, we're looking at a comprehensive rule that will address New Source Review." The purpose, he continued, is to assure companies that they "are not going to face new permitting requirements under the Clean Air Act" as they make investments to reduce pollution.

Pruitt, who also termed New Source Review "one of the greatest issues" facing EPA, did not give a timetable for the undertaking. Late last year, he had announced "an assessment of opportunities" to streamline the program, but stopped short of saying he would attempt a major rewrite.

Asked today for more details, EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman in an emailed response appeared to hedge: "We are taking a comprehensive look at the program and plan to make a number of targeted changes that, altogether, will produce significant improvement."

The New Source Review (NSR) program, a pillar of the act, requires manufacturers, utilities and other industries to get preconstruction permits before building a new plant or embarking on major changes to an existing facility.

Businesses have long complained that NSR requirements are a drag on economic development and may even discourage efforts to curb emissions. The program "is impeding modernization and growth in the U.S. manufacturing sector," Paul Noe, a top official of the American Forest and Paper Association, said at a February hearing of the same subcommittee.

NSR defenders, pointing to the economy's current health, say major changes could lead to more pollution and that industry in any case is laying out a false choice. Clean air and growth "go hand in hand," George Washington University environmental law professor Emily Hammond said at the February hearing.

Relaxing NSR requirements is also a long-standing priority for EPA air chief Bill Wehrum. After pursuing sweeping changes with mixed success during an earlier stint at the agency during the George W. Bush administration, Wehrum said in December that he planned a more "targeted" strategy.

"Last time around, we swung for the fences," he told EPA's Clean Air Act Advisory Committee, resorting to a baseball analogy. "This time around, what I'd like to do is hit a bunch of singles and maybe a couple of doubles, and if we keep that up, we're going to start scoring some runs."

It was not immediately clear how Wehrum's small-ball game plan would jibe with the broader revamp that Pruitt suggested yesterday is in the works. Environmental groups are already alarmed by two changes to NSR requirements imposed by Pruitt in recent months in guidance memos that sidestepped public notice-and-comment requirements that would accompany a formal rulemaking.

Under the first, EPA no longer challenges the preconstruction estimates of expected emissions increase from a particular project (Greenwire, Dec. 8, 2017). The second condenses the emissions forecasting process for planned plant expansions or other significant changes to a major industrial emitter (E&E News PM, March 13).

Still more contentious has been Wehrum's decision to drop the "once in, always in" policy that — while not directly related to NSR — had maintained strict hazardous air pollutant standards for major pollution sources even after their releases fell below the thresholds that originally triggered those standards (Greenwire, Jan. 26).

The state of California and an array of environmental groups are now suing to reverse Wehrum's decision. In a letter earlier this week, Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) and 86 other House Democrats urged Pruitt to reinstate the policy (E&E Daily, April 26).

At yesterday's E&C Environment Subcommittee hearing, Dingell queried Pruitt on whether the agency had done any advance analysis of the potential health effects of the decision to scrap the policy on children, pregnant women and other groups. "That's something we'll have to assess and provide," Pruitt responded.

BNA
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=132869137&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY
EPA Working on Legal Basis for Year-Round Biofuels Sales: Pruitt
By Jennifer A Dlouhy, 4/27/18

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said the agency is working to justify issuing a waiver that would allow year-round sales of gasoline containing 15 percent ethanol.

The Environmental Protection Agency is “trying to ensure the legal basis is sound, because there will be litigation,” Pruitt told Rep. Dave Loebsack (D-Iowa) in a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing. “I intend to finish that process very soon.”

The EPA regulates the vapor pressure of gasoline sold at retail stations from June 1 to Sept. 15 to reduce emissions and mitigate the effects of ozone-related health problems.

More than 25 waivers have been issued to small refineries exempting them from 2018 renewable fuel quotas so far, Pruitt said.

Applications are still pending in 2018, but “it's over that number for 2018 as I understand it,” he told Loebsack.

Pruitt said he wasn't sure if CVR Energy Inc., a refiner majority owned by billionaire Carl Icahn, sought a waiver exempting any of its refineries.

Under the federal Renewable Fuel Standard, about 38 refineries that use no more than 75,000 barrels of crude a day are eligible for those waivers, regardless of the size of their parent companies; a federal court ruling last year made it easier to get waivers.

Politico
https://www.politicopro.com/agriculture/whiteboard/2018/04/pruitt-leaves-door-open-to-lake-erie-tmdl-1124375
Pruitt leaves door open to Lake Erie TMDL
By Annie Snider, 4/26/18, 5:03 PM

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt left the door open to issuing a pollution diet for Lake Erie, a controversial step that farmers across the Great Lakes region have fought vehemently.

In response to questioning today from Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), Pruitt said that there has been a commitment to dealing with Lake Erie's phosphorus problem "through cooperation," but admitted that "certain states need to do more." Pruitt was testifying to a House Appropriations subcommittee, his second congressional hearing of the day.

"I think that we have to look at TMDL opportunities to address that if states refuse to take the steps that they're supposed to take," Pruitt said, referring to Total Maximum Daily Loads that would likely place a greater burden on farmers in the watershed to reduce their polluted runoff.

Great Lakes environmental groups have sought a TMDL for Lake Erie akin to the landmark Chesapeake Bay cleanup plan. The lake suffers annual toxic algae blooms, including one in the summer of 2014 that fouled the water intake for the city of Toledo for a full weekend.

The state of Ohio initially refused to list its portion of Lake Erie as impaired, the first step towards drafting a TMDL, but backtracked earlier this year following a lawsuit from environmentalists and pressure from EPA.

Under the Clean Water Act, states are supposed to draft TMDLs for all impaired waters, but because the process is complex and time-consuming, there is a large backlog.

BNA
http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=132869144&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY
Pruitt and His Air Chief Diverge on Industrial Expansion Permits
By Jennifer Lu, 4/27/18

The EPA is looking at a "comprehensive rule" to address air permits for facilities that plan to expand or upgrade their operations, Administrator Scott Pruitt said April 26.

The EPA chief made the comment during a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing that mainly focused on Pruitt's spending and ethics issues. His emphasis on an air permit rulemaking appears to depart from earlier statements by his air chief who said the agency would be relying on non-binding guidance.

Pruitt didn't elaborate on when or how the Environmental Protection Agency would move forward with a rule on the permitting program, known as New Source Review. The program governs what pollution controls are required when power plants, industrial boilers, and other pollution sources make operational modifications that go beyond routine maintenance.

Changing Tune
His assertion that a rule was planned diverges from earlier statements of his air chief, William Wehrum, who recently told Bloomberg Environment that the agency would rely on guidance to address what are called "preconstruction permits."

"We can provide clear guidance through guidance," Wehrum said in an April 13 interview with Bloomberg Environment. "Our strategy is to tell people sooner rather than later how we think the program should be implemented."

The EPA under Pruitt has changed how facilities tally upgrade-related emissions that trigger new pollution controls under the program.

Costly Controls, Expanded Plants
The permit program requires factories and power plants to install costly new air pollution controls when they expand or make modifications that increase their emissions. Industry groups sought changes that in many cases would exclude them from having to add the controls.

So far, the EPA has made the changes in three non-binding guidance documents released in December, March, and April.

Although relying on guidance can effect changes quickly, another administration can easily reverse them.

Environmental critics have said that making policy through guidance circumvents the public notice and comments process that's required in rulemaking.

If, as Pruitt indicated, the agency does pursue a rulemaking, it could run into obstacles set by legal precedents that reversed some of Wehrum's rulemaking efforts when he served as acting air chief during the George W. Bush administration. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit revoked most of the changes made during those rulemaking efforts.

The Daily Signal
https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/04/26/scott-pruitts-effort-to-expose-secret-science-has-environmentalists-scared-stiff/
Scott Pruitt's Effort to Expose 'Secret Science' Has Environmentalists Scared Stiff
By Diane Katz, 4/26/18

A proposed rule announced Tuesday by Scott Pruitt, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is intended to bring much-needed transparency to agency rulemaking.

The environmental lobby is positively apoplectic about the proposal (naturally), even though it aligns perfectly with their long-held commitment to the public's "right to know" principle.

The proposed regulation would require EPA to ensure that the scientific data and research models "pivotal" to significant regulation are "publicly available in a manner sufficient for validation and analysis."

Despite existing rules on government use of scientific research, federal agencies routinely mask politically driven regulations as scientifically based imperatives. The supposed science underlying these rules is often hidden from the general public and unavailable for vetting by experts. But credible science and transparency are necessary elements of sound policy.

The opposition from greens and much of the media greeting Pruitt's announcement is, frankly, hypocritical in the extreme. Opponents claim that EPA's regulatory power would be unduly restricted if the agency is forced to reveal the scientific data and research methodologies used in rulemaking.

But that is precisely the point. The EPA should no longer enjoy free rein to impose major regulations based on studies that are unavailable for public scrutiny.

Their claim that research subjects' privacy would be violated is groundless. Researchers routinely scrub identifying information when aggregating data for analysis. Nor is personal information even relevant in agency rulemaking.

Meanwhile, the EPA and other federal agencies are duty-bound to protect proprietary information.

Transparency in rulemaking is vital to evaluating whether regulation is justified and effective. It is also essential to testing the "reproducibility" of research findings, which is a bedrock principle of the scientific method.

It takes real chutzpah for the champions of environmental "right-to-know" laws to now claim that the EPA should not be required to make public the scientific material on which regulations are based.

The public's "right to know" was their rallying cry in lobbying for a variety of public disclosure requirements on the private sector as well as state and local governments, including informational labeling; emissions reporting; workplace safety warnings; beach advisories; environmental liabilities; and pending enforcement actions, to name a few.

The proposed rule is hardly radical. It aligns with the Data Access Act, which requires federal agencies to ensure that data produced under grants to (and agreements with) universities, hospitals, and non-profit organizations is available to the public through the Freedom of Information Act.

However, the implementation guidance from the Office of Management and Budget has unduly restricted application of the act.

Moreover, the Information Quality Act requires the Office of Management and Budget "to promulgate guidance to agencies ensuring the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information (including statistical information) disseminated by federal agencies."

However, the act's effectiveness has been limited by a lack of agency accountability. Courts have ruled that the act does not permit judicial review of an agency's compliance with its provisions. The proposed rule is also consistent with the Office of Management and Budget's Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

The proposal also mirrors legislation passed by the House last year to prohibit EPA from "proposing, finalizing, or disseminating a covered action unless all scientific and technical information relied on to support such action is the best available science, specifically identified, and publicly available in a manner sufficient for independent analysis and substantial reproduction of research results."

A Senate companion measure failed to advance to a vote.

EPA regulation has expanded exponentially every decade since the 1970s at tremendous expense to the nation. Secret science underlies some of the most expansive regulatory initiatives.

President Donald Trump has focused significant attention on re-establishing the constitutional and statutory boundaries routinely breached by the agency. The special interests that thrive on gloom and ever-increasing government powers are attempting to block the administration's reforms at every turn.

But their opposition to the proposed transparency rule sets a new low for abject hypocrisy.

E&E Greenwire
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060080331/search?keyword=EPA
OMB backdates completion date for 'secret science' review
By Sean Reilly, 4/27/18

The White House has altered an official timeline to show that a required review of a proposed EPA science rule was finished one day before agency Administrator Scott Pruitt signed it this past Tuesday.

The Reginfo.gov site had previously shown that the proposal cleared Office of Management and Budget on Wednesday, indicating Pruitt went forward with the signing before the interagency review was complete.

OMB backdated that to Monday after E&E News reported the discrepancy yesterday (Greenwire, April 26).

Coalter Baker, a spokesman for the budget office, would not provide an on-the-record explanation as to the reason for the change. At EPA, spokeswoman Liz Bowman had earlier said in a statement that the review was finished before the signing, adding that "any questions about the management" of the Reginfo.gov site should be addressed to OMB.

"This is all highly irregular," Paul Billings, senior vice president for advocacy at the American Lung Association, said later in an interview. "Either it speaks to a significant lack of competence at EPA or OMB, or there is some sort of funny business or cover-up going on." The association, which has been critical of the proposal, closely tracks EPA rulemakings related to air quality issues.

The proposed rule, which has already sparked considerable controversy, would effectively bar EPA from using scientific research in crafting new regulations unless the underlying data are made public.

"I think it enhances transparency and the confidence of the American people as we do rulemaking," Pruitt said in the proposal's defense at a hearing yesterday of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment.

Critics say the aim is to keep EPA from tapping studies that could signal the need for tighter pollution regulations.

"The result will be policies and practices that will ignore significant risks to the health of every American," almost 1,000 scientists and technical experts said in a letter to Pruitt earlier this week released by the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle quizzed Pruitt on the proposal at yesterday's hearing, with Republicans praising his approach and Democrats panning it. EPA is set to open a 30-day public comment period on the draft rule Monday, according to an upcoming Federal Register notice.

The purpose of the OMB reviews is to get feedback on regulatory proposals from other agencies and outside groups. The Reginfo.gov site serves as a clearinghouse on the status of rulemakings across government.

At a separate hearing two weeks ago, Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) had sought to pin down Neomi Rao, head of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, on her views of the appropriate handling of scientific research (E&E Daily, April 13). Asked by Hassan whether she would "generally support agencies changing their procedures in ways that prevent them from using the best available evidence in making these decisions," Rao responded, "No, I would not."

Assuming that the revised completion date on the site is now accurate, however, Rao's office hustled the proposed science rule back to EPA only four days after receiving it on April 19 (Greenwire, April 20.) Under the long-standing executive order that governs the reviews, they can typically last as long as 90 days. Of the half-dozen other EPA

regulatory measures still at OMB, most have been under review for approximately two weeks or more, according to the Reginfo.gov site.

Hassan is "deeply concerned" that Rao signed off so quickly on a draft regulation that "could have far-reaching impacts" on the public and the environment, spokeswoman Ricki Eshman said in a statement yesterday. She "will continue urging Pruitt to reconsider this senseless proposal."

Baker, the OMB spokesman, did not reply to an emailed request for comment.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/385230-epa-approved-aide-to-work-for-gop-consultancy-firm-and-florida
EPA approved aide to work for GOP firm, Florida lawmaker
By Miranda Green, 4/27/18, 2:56 PM

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved one of Administrator Scott Pruitt's political aides to do outside consulting work for a Republican firm, internal documents obtained in a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request show.

EPA ethics officials approved John Konkus to work for Jamestown Associates, a Washington, D.C.-based political consulting firm, and a Florida state representative while he was still employed at the agency, E&E News first reported Friday.

EPA did not release the name of the Florida lawmaker. Jamestown Associates boasts on its website that it helped Donald Trump's presidential campaign win and buoyed Chris Christie's 2013 New Jersey gubernatorial race.

The document dated Aug. 1, 2017, from EPA ethics official Justina Fugh approved Konkus's request to partake in the paid outside work. The letter also acknowledged the Konkus had plans to add additional clients in the "next six months." The letter stated that Konkus could not earn more than $27,765 through outside compensation.

"We have determined that providing consolatory media advice is not a fiduciary role, and you will be providing those services directly as opposed to through any corporation," the letter read.

The ethics office approved Konkus to advise clients about "strategy, mail and media production."

Another internal letter obtained by E&E news found that Konkus never performed outside work in 2017.

In a public financial disclosure report for Konkus's 2017 wages, Fugh wrote a note on April 25, 2018, that read, "Even though Mr. Konkus had sought prior approval of anticipated outside activity, he indicated that he did not in fact engage in any outside activity at all during calendar year 2017. Therefore, he has no outside income or position to report."

Konkus's arrangement was first revealed in a letter the EPA sent in January to Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (N.J.), the top Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

But the agency redacted the names of the clients Konkus was approved to work for.

At the time, Pallone and his Democratic colleagues questioned whether Konkus's outside employment raised a conflict of interest.

"A political appointee cutting millions of dollars in funding to EPA grant recipients on what appears to be a politically motivated basis, while at the same time being authorized to serve as a paid media consultant to unnamed outside

clients, raises serious concerns of potential conflicts of interest," Pallone wrote along with Democratic Reps. Diana DeGette (Colo.), Paul Tonko (N.Y.) and Kathy Castor (Fla.).

E&E Daily
https://www.eenews.net/eedaily/stories/1060080271/search?keyword=konkus
Pruitt aide approved to work for GOP firm, Fla. lawmaker
By Kevin Bogardus, 4/27/18

John Konkus, one of EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's political aides, was approved by ethics officials to work outside the agency for a Republican political consulting firm and a Florida state representative.

E&E News won a Freedom of Information Act appeal to reveal that Konkus' "two likely clients" were a former employer, Jamestown Associates, and an unnamed state lawmaker from the Sunshine State, according to an unredacted copy of the ethics memo approving his outside activity.

Under the memo dated last August, Konkus, the deputy associate administrator in EPA's public affairs office, was allowed to advise clients about "strategy, mail and media production."

Other EPA records obtained by E&E News, however, indicate that Konkus never did any work for his prospective clients.

"Even though Mr. Konkus had sought prior approval of anticipated outside activity, he indicated that he did not in fact engage in any outside activity at all during calendar year 2017. Therefore, he has no outside income or position to report," reads a note from Justina Fugh, EPA's senior counsel for ethics, on Konkus' financial disclosure report for 2018.

In addition, in an email sent to Konkus last Friday, Fugh memorialized a conversation with him from earlier that day.

"Your report will not include any income from any outside clients because, as we discussed today, you never did engage in any outside activity for any clients in [calendar year] 2017," Fugh said.

"I approved you for the possibility of outside activity, but given the demands of your EPA duties, you never took on any clients at all. What you will be reporting in your [financial disclosure report] is that fact that you never had any clients after all, so have nothing to enter as additional income or outside positions on your financial disclosure report."

In addition, Konkus' approval from EPA to do work outside the agency has now been pulled back.

"You informed me that you simply do not have any time or inclination to consider any outside activity in the future. Thus, this note confirms that you no longer need the prior approval of outside activity. We will consider that approval to be rescinded since it's unnecessary," Fugh said in her April 20 email to Konkus.

EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman said, "As the EPA ethics officer indicated, John followed the law, and furthermore never did any outside work."

Konkus declined to comment for this story when contacted by E&E News, including when asked who the Florida state representative was as one of his "likely clients."

Barney Keller, a partner with Jamestown Associates, confirmed to E&E News that Konkus has done no work for the firm.

"You're correct that John does no work for Jamestown since joining the Trump administration," Keller said. "As far as the state representative, I can't disclose that. But I am sure he wants to make America great again!"

Keller also told E&E News last month that Konkus had not worked for the firm after leaving it for federal service (Greenwire, March 5).

Also now unredacted in the memo is the name of another firm. Konkus was told not to contact the federal government on its behalf.

"You cannot contact the US government on behalf of Saint Luke Solutions LLC or any of your clients," said the EPA memo, which was also signed by Fugh. Konkus is a registered agent for a Saint Luke Solutions in Palm Harbor, Fla., according to state records.

Konkus' initial redacted memo approving his outside work attracted scrutiny from Democrats on Capitol Hill.

Last month, members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee sent a letter to Pruitt asking the EPA chief for the names of Konkus' clients and questioned whether he could be impartial in his service at EPA.

The lawmakers — Reps. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), Diana DeGette (D-Colo.), Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) and Kathy Castor (D-Fla.) — also noted his prior work at Jamestown Associates and noted that President Trump's 2016 campaign was one of the firm's clients.

Konkus, the Florida Panhandle field office manager for Trump's presidential campaign, also served as Pruitt's "media sherpa" for the incoming administration's transition team. Konkus joined EPA and in an unusual move for a political appointee was put in charge of reviewing its grant solicitations.

EPA, under the Trump administration, has had other financial ties to Republican consulting firms.

Go BIG Media Inc., which has worked on behalf of GOP campaigns and groups, contracted with EPA to help draft the agency's year-end report praising Pruitt.

Definers Corp., a Republican-run public affairs firm, also signed a media clipping services contract with EPA that was canceled after it garnered attention (Greenwire, March 9).

Daily Caller
http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/26/free-market-groups-end-clean-power-plan/
Free Market Groups Call For Clean Power Plan To End
By Jason Hopkins, 4/26/18, 6:24 PM

The Competitive Enterprise Institute, along with a host of other libertarian and free market organizations, came out in strong support of the EPA's bid to repeal the Clean Power Plan, releasing a detailed report Thursday regarding issues the Obama-era regulation has wrought onto the energy industry.

"The Clean Power Plan results in more potential harms than benefits for Americans and should be repealed. By undermining states' authority over their energy markets, the CPP traps Americans under a harmful policy that will raise their electricity bills and eliminate interstate competition that enables citizens to vote with their feet and escape burdensome regulatory and tax policies," wrote CEI senior fellow Marlo Lewis, who served as the report's lead author.

"And for what?" Lewis continued. "The CPP's climate impact is vanishingly small — a hypothetical and likely undetectable 0.018°C reduction in average global temperatures by 2100. Such a small change would make no discernible difference in weather patterns, sea levels, or even polar bear populations by century's end. The climate 'benefits' in 2030 at the end of the CPP compliance period would be even more miniscule."

The 42-page report goes into meticulous detail on why CPP is “unlawful, economically destructive, and attempts to make the EPA into a national climate policy legislator and energy czar.”

CEI was joined by numerous like-minded groups, including Americans for Prosperity, Freedom Works, Americans for Tax Reform, among others. All of their leaders had long sought an end to the Clean Power Plan, but their wishes have come closer to reality with the entrance of President Donald Trump’s administration, where officials have announced they will be undoing it.

The outgoing regulation was a hallmark of former President Obama’s climate legacy. The 44th president first proposed the rule in 2014 and finalized it in 2015. CPP places a limit on the amount of greenhouse gases power plants can emit and aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. CPP is regarded by the fossil fuel industry as needlessly stringent, placing harsh demands on producers while resulting in negligible environmental gains. Critics have also referred to the rule as a part of Obama’s “war on coal.”

Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt would sign a proposed rule to repeal the CPP, the administrator announced on October 10, 2017. Undoing the rule will save Americans $33 billion in compliance costs, despite the previous administration claiming it would only cost $8.4 billion and save millions through public health benefits, according to EPA estimations.

Although the current administration is moving ahead, the federal regulatory process will likely slow finalization of repeal for a couple of years. The process could take longer if environmental groups successfully block a rollback in court.

Los Angeles Times
http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-mileage-20180427-story.html
Trump administration aims to block California on fuel economy targets
By Evan Halper, 4/27/18, 10:20 AM

The Trump administration is speeding toward all-out war with California over fuel economy rules for cars and SUVs, proposing to revoke the state's long-standing authority to enforce its own, tough rules on tailpipe emissions.

The move forms a key part of the Environmental Protection Agency's fuel economy proposal, which the agency plans to submit to the White House for review within days.

The EPA plan would freeze fuel economy targets at the levels required for vehicles sold in 2020, and leave those targets in place through 2026, according to federal officials who have reviewed the plan. That would mark a dramatic retreat from the existing law, which aimed to get the nation's fleet of cars and light trucks to an average fuel economy of 55 miles per gallon by 2025.

The EPA plan remains a draft, and White House officials could decide to back away from a direct fight with California and like-minded states.

EPA spokesperson Liz Bowman declined to comment on the details of the draft plan, which the agency is writing together with the National Highway Transportation Safety Agency.

"The Agency is continuing to work with NHTSA to develop a joint proposed rule and is looking forward to the interagency process," she wrote in an email.

Environmental groups and California officials already have vowed to fight the administration in court. But if the EPA plan prevails, it would be a crippling blow to efforts in California and other states to meet aggressive goals for climate action as well as for cleaning their air.

Under federal law, California has long been allowed to set tougher tailpipe emission rules than the federal government. Other states are allowed to adopt California's standards, and a dozen states currently do. Those states account for more than a third of cars and trucks in the country.

The administration proposal would revoke the ability of any state, including California, to impose rules different from those made in Washington.

The radical rollback of mileage targets the draft document envisions being imposed nationwide goes further even than the auto industry has sought, and it threatens to disrupt their business. The plan would be destined for years of costly litigation, creating uncertainty for carmakers.

"Rather than pursuing a reasonable compromise, the Trump administration is crafting a proposal that is dramatically weaker than any automobile manufacturer has requested and that also deliberately seeks to embark on a legal collision course with the state of California — a scenario that automakers, lawmakers and the state of California have all repeatedly urged the administration to avoid," said Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), the ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee.

"If enacted, this proposal would be a loss for the environment, a loss for consumers, a loss for the state of California and a loss for the auto industry, which is why all parties must come together immediately to find a workable solution that we know is very much within reach."

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/385240-dem-states-say-pruitt-must-recuse-himself-from-climate-rule-repeal
Dem AGs renew call for Pruitt to recuse himself from climate rule repeal process
By Timothy Cama, 4/27/18, 3:10 PM

Democratic state attorneys general are renewing their call for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) head Scott Pruitt to recuse himself from the process of repealing the agency's climate change rule for power plants.

The group of AGs representing 16 states, cities and counties argue Pruitt has demonstrated that he doesn't have an open mind on the Clean Power Plan, thus violating the expectations of due process and fairness in regulatory proceedings.

"The American people are entitled to an impartial decision-maker. EPA Administrator Pruitt simply cannot be that person," California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D), who is leading the charge, said in a statement.

"He must be recused from any involvement in the EPA's attempt to repeal the Clean Power Plan."

Before taking the helm of the EPA last year, Pruitt was attorney general of Oklahoma where he led numerous initiatives to fight the Obama administration's EPA, including lawsuits against the Clean Power Plan.

Becerra's coalition previously asked Pruitt to recuse himself in January from the deregulatory process, renewing their call this week for him to do so.

The newest filing, made late Thursday, cites new evidence to back up their claim, like Pruitt saying the EPA "acted outside of rule of law, and they acted outside of the scope of authority given to them by the U.S. Congress" in February and saying just this week that "by repealing and replacing the so-called Clean Power Plan, we are ending a one-size-fits-all regulation on energy providers and restoring the rule of law."

The EPA did not respond to a request for comment.

Thursday marked the deadline for the public and stakeholders to file comments on the EPA's plan to repeal its climate change rule for power plants.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/385163-new-york-threatens-to-sue-trump-over-epa-climate-rule-repeal
New York threatens to sue Trump over EPA climate rule repeal
By Timothy Cama, 4/27/18, 10:29 PM

New York state will sue the Trump administration if it carries out its proposal to repeal the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) climate-change rule for power plants.

Eric Schneiderman (D), New York's attorney general, led a coalition of 26 Democratic states, cities and counties late Thursday in filing formal comments objecting to EPA head Scott Pruitt's plan to repeal the Clean Power Plan.

"The law and the science are clear. The Trump EPA's efforts to dismantle this vital measure once again demonstrate that they're more committed to pleasing the fossil fuel industry than protecting the health, safety, and wallets of New Yorkers and Americans," Schneiderman said in a statement Friday.

"As we've made clear, if the Trump EPA refuses to protect those they serve and abandons this unlawful and unsupported repeal of the Clean Power Plan, we'll see them in court."

New York and other Democratic states have sued the Trump administration over numerous policy changes.

They have had a number of successes in the energy and environmental policy space, with lawsuits seeking to stop rollbacks or delays of policies on methane emissions, energy efficiency, vehicle fuel efficiency and more.

In the coalition letter filed on Thursday — the deadline for public comments on the EPA's proposal — the states, cities and counties argued that the EPA is obligated to aggressively regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, as it did in the Clean Power Plan.

"The statute requires EPA to set limits on carbon pollution from existing power plants, yet the agency is proposing to repeal the Clean Power Plan without replacing it with any alternative rule, much less a substitute that requires equivalent or greater pollution reductions," they wrote.

In proposing the repeal in October 2017, the EPA argued that the Obama administration exceeded its legal authority when it wrote the original rule.

Pruitt is separately proposing to replace the Clean Power Plan with a more industry-friendly alternative focused on smaller emissions reductions that coal plants could make.

The Hill
http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/385127-epa-removes-international-priorities-page-from-site
EPA removes 'international priorities' page from site
By Julia Manchester, 4/26/18, 10:35 PM

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) removed an "international priorities" page from its website in December, according to a report released this week by the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative (EDGI).

The page had listed climate change, clean air, clean water, e-waste, toxic chemicals, and strong environmental institutions among its international priorities.

EDGI also reports the agency removed its “International Grants and Cooperative Agreements” and “International Cooperation” pages.

The "International Cooperation" page said the EPA sought to "promote sustainable development, protect vulnerable populations, facilitate commerce, and engage diplomatically around the world” with “global and bilateral partners.”

An EPA spokesperson told Think Progress that the agency continually updates its website to reflect new initiatives.

“Of course the site will be reflective of the current administration’s priorities – with that said, all the content from the previous administration is still easily accessible and publicly available through the banner across the top of the main page of the site,” the spokesperson said.

This is not the first time the agency has removed references from its website, with the EPA under the Trump administration removing various references to climate change from its website in the past.

AP
https://apnews.com/0f4d70467f0c4ffe967777df355bc757/Smoke-from-Wisconsin-refinery-explosion-poses-health-risk
Smoke from Wisconsin refinery explosion poses health risk
By Matthew Brown, 4/27/18

An explosion and asphalt fire at a Wisconsin oil refinery sent huge plumes of smoke into the air that pollution experts said almost certainly contained large amounts of toxins, posing a serious health risk to those living downwind.

Asphalt is a petroleum product that when burned emits chemicals in gaseous form and small particles that can linger long after the smoke dissipates, said Wilma Subra, a chemist with the Louisiana Environmental Action Network who has examined past refinery accidents.

The gases include so-called volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which can cause symptoms ranging from dizziness, breathing problems and nausea to liver damage and cancer, depending on the level and length of exposure, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Also present in asphalt smoke are microscopic particles of chemicals that stick together as visible smoke.

Those particles carry cancer-causing benzene and other contaminants that can lodge deep in the lungs when inhaled. From there, they can pass directly into a person’s bloodstream, said Neil Carman, a former refinery inspector for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, now with the Sierra Club.

“Anybody breathing that stuff should be very concerned about what’s getting into deep tissue, into the bloodstream,” Carman said. “When you see that kind of smoke, it means you’re getting a lot of unburned hydrocarbons. ... Those particles are loaded with carcinogens.”

Officials ordered an evacuation of a wide area around the Husky Energy refinery to reduce the public's exposure to the plume. The fire Thursday was later put out, and residents were told they could return to their homes. But then authorities announced the evacuation order would remain and be re-evaluated throughout the night.

Government agencies planned to conduct air monitoring tests to gauge the hazard, refinery manager Kollin Schade said during an evening press conference.

The duration and extent of the toxic hazard depends on a variety of factors, such as wind direction and speed, proximity to the refinery and weather events that can trap pollution close to the ground, said Elena Craft, senior health scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund.

Federal officials did not immediately respond to questions about the health risks from the smoke. A spokeswoman for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services referred questions to local officials in Douglas County, who could not be reached for comment.

Bloomberg
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-27/tesla-s-foe-in-fight-over-electric-vehicle-rebate-utilities
Tesla's Foe in Fight Over Electric Vehicle Rebate: Utilities
By John Lippert and Mark Chediak, 4/27/18, 7:13 AM

Early adopters of the electric car often band together in what can seem, in the age of Donald Trump and resurgent sport utility vehicles, like a lonely defense of an unloved technology. But today in California, the state doing the most to cultivate emission-free driving through lucrative incentives, the businesses trying to profit from electric vehicles will be fighting each other.

At issue during a California Air Resources Board hearing in Sacramento on Friday will be rebates the state pays to EV buyers using proceeds from the sale of Low Carbon Fuel Standard credits. Under the program, energy producers who fail to meet the state's low-carbon fuel targets buy credits from those who've already complied. Following state guidelines, the sellers use a portion of the proceeds to pay rebates that range from $50 to $599 for each electric vehicle, which are paid out by the utilities who provide electricity for residential and workplace recharging.

Tesla Inc. and Ford Motor Co. have urged the state's powerful emissions regulator to let automakers pay out the rebate at the moment they sell the car, as a way to boost sales, instead of making consumers wait for a check from their utility or a credit on their bill. Ken Morgan, Tesla's director of business development, said the electric carmaker might even boost the rebate beyond what utilities offer.

Tesla's proposal comes as Model 3 production delays are draining its cash and the company is close to exhausting the availability of a $7,500 federal tax credit. But whoever doles out the rebates would be required to use all money earmarked for low-carbon rebates to pay consumers or associated expenses. "This gives us no direct benefit other than to help everybody sell more electric cars," Morgan said in an interview.

Even so, passing out free money is a great way to build brand loyalty, and Tesla and utilities are elbowing each other hard for the privilege. Eileen Tutt, executive director of a trade association whose board includes California utilities, said she's "adamantly opposed" to letting automakers pay out the rebates. She said the utilities should continue doing so, though she's meeting with Tesla and others to discuss possible improvements.

California certainly wants to help Tesla, Ford and other automakers sell EVs—and already levies stiff penalties if they don't. But utilities have also emerged as aggressive advocates of electric transportation, since ratepayer-funded charging stations represent their first big new revenue opportunity in decades.

Tutt said she's opposed to letting automakers pay out the rebates because, for one thing, their financial disclosures are skimpy compared to those of heavily regulated utilities. "The automakers are saying, 'Just trust us,'" said Tutt, executive director of the California Electric Transportation Coalition in Sacramento.

In a report last month, the ARB staff sided with utilities. But Sam Wade, chief of the agency's transport fuels program, said he likes the idea of distributing rebates when people are at showrooms buying cars and hopes to work with Tesla and utilities to make this happen. Eventually, he said, the state's low-carbon rebates for battery-only cars could reach $1,500.

At Friday's meeting, ARB will vote on whether the staff should change direction on this and other issues during a formal rulemaking. A final vote is scheduled for September.

California started on a path toward writing its own clean-air rules in 1972 when Mary Nichols, now the ARB chair, argued the first federal lawsuit to make the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency enforce the Clean Air Act. A dozen other states have opted to model their own clean-air rules after California. This has prompted the current EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt, to warn that California shouldn't be allowed to "dictate" clean air policies for the rest of the nation.

Tesla has been a major beneficiary of California's clean-energy push, which also targets automakers. Since 2008, the company has sold more than $1.3 billion in regulatory credits to other automakers who don't meet the state's requirements for zero-emission vehicles or greenhouse-gas emission reductions.

The debate comes as California prepares its first major update to its low-carbon fuels standard since 2009. Among other things, the state wants to boost the required low-carbon content of its transport fuels to 20 percent by 2030, from 5 percent this year. This would take the state about a tenth of the way toward its legislative mandate of cutting overall carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2030.

Companies comply with the standard by blending low-carbon fuels into their existing gasoline or diesel supplies, or by buying credits from those who don't need them. The credits are getting more expensive as California's emission targets get tougher. On March 20, the credits sold for a record $152 per metric ton, about five times more than the price three years earlier, according to ARB data.

By 2030, the program could be generating credits worth $3.75 billion a year, up from $1.4 billion this year, according to Jeremy Martin, an analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington, D.C. Since 2009, this potential windfall has helped spark investments worth $2 billion in low-carbon fuels, said Simon Mui, director of clean vehicles and fuels at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

California policies have started changing the state's fuel supply. Renewable sources like biomass and bio-methane now make up about 20 percent of all diesel sales, state figures show. Corn-based ethanol producers are switching to natural gas and other lower-carbon heat sources, and as a result the carbon intensity of this fuel has dropped by 21 percent. Aera Energy LLC and GlassPoint Solar Inc. are building the state's largest solar farm to generate steam for oil extraction near Bakersfield. By 2030, the state plans to triple the amount of low-carbon electricity used as a transport fuel.

Drivers of conventional vehicles have felt the impact. Gasoline costs about $3.60 per gallon in California, or 80 cents more than the national average, according to AAA. The low-carbon credits account for about a dime's worth of this difference, state figures show.

Critics include the Western States Petroleum Association. "These standards are still too aggressive," wrote Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the group's president, in a filing prior to Friday's hearing. Poet LLC, a South Dakota-based ethanol producer, has been battling the low-carbon credits in court for years, accusing the state of undercounting nitrogen oxide emissions from low-carbon diesel. As a result, the state plans to delay further increases in the diesel portion of the requirement for about a year.

The rest of the state's low-carbon regime will get tougher, though, even as President Trump attacks what he calls California's "out of control" state policies. California Governor Jerry Brown will wrap up his final term in January, and his replacement will be left with the task of overseeing regulations for low-carbon jet fuel and for carbon capture and storage at ethanol plants—measures that would be new even in California, which is at the vanguard of U.S. environmental policy.

With the EPA currently sidelined by Trump's anti-regulatory agenda, California will play an even greater role in providing a model to other states such as Oregon—and even countries such as Canada and Brazil—that are now writing their own low-carbon fuel mandates, Martin said.

Politico
https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/26/trump-chaos-pompeo-jackson-macron-557053
Ronny Jackson drama overshadows Pompeo success for White House
By Nancy Cook, 4/26/18, 6:05 PM

White House aides were reveling in the pomp of French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit, viewing it as a welcome reprieve from the chaos of Cabinet confirmations, an intensifying Russia probe and a boss with a short fuse. Then reality hit.

President Donald Trump's pick for Veterans Affairs Secretary Ronny Jackson finally withdrew from the confirmation process amid escalating allegations of misconduct, and Trump called into the TV show Fox and Friends to deliver an unscripted interview touching on everything from the Russia probe and the investigation of his personal attorney Michael Cohen to fan-tweets from Kanye West—all before 10 a.m.

The day also included the confirmation of Mike Pompeo, previously Trump's CIA director, as secretary of state—an unexpectedly hard-fought victory that was overshadowed by routine House hearings featuring testimony from EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, who has been accused of a string of ethics violations.

"The state visit was cool for folks in the White House and fun distraction for one hour from stories about Scott Pruitt or Michael Cohen before everyone got back to the shitshow," said one former White House official.

The president often publicly frames these hectic junctures as a White House unduly under siege from the press or other opponents. About Jackson's nomination, Trump said on Thursday: "He's a great man, and he got treated very, very unfairly. He got treated really unfairly. And he's a hell of a man."

The lack of vetting and Trump's tendency to name top-level nominees with little scrutiny dates back to the presidential transition in the fall of 2016. It's a pattern that surprises few insiders, even as it creates headaches for the White House and the nominees.

"Generally, White House aides are blaming the president from shooting from the hip and without giving it any thought, but this is how every decision he has made has gone," said the former White House official.

On Wednesday, the night before Jackson dropped out of consideration, a number of administration aides and Republicans close to the White House gathered at the Trump International Hotel for after-work drinks—and a few aides kept hoping aloud that Jackson would announce he was dropping out on TV, so no one would have to run back to the White House and everyone could keep drinking, according to one attendee.

The biggest beneficiary of this week's chaos was Pruitt, who started out the week under great scrutiny and disdain from several disparate circles of White House staffers and then ultimately skated through his two Capitol Hill hearings with

little incident. Earlier in the week, those hearings were seen as a make-or-break moment for the EPA Administrator and ones that the president would pay attention to.

"As long as his explanations hold and there are no crazy discrepancies or smoking gun or anything like that, I don't think that creates any red flags for Pruitt," said one Republican close to the White House, who predicted Pruitt would survive the scrutiny.

What helps Pruitt and other Cabinet nominees who frustrate the White House or Trump is the math in the Senate. The Republicans do not have a large or cohesive enough majority to easily confirm new Cabinet secretaries , and the drama surrounding Jackson's departure puts a damper on creating any new vacancies to fill.

"In the ideal situation, the only headlines coming out of the agencies are the policy decisions advancing the president's agenda," said one senior administration aide, speaking about the spate of bad headlines surrounding Pruitt's leadership at the EPA. "That is the clear direction from the top, and we've communicated that."

But many White House officials—and the president himself—have adopted the view that the administration is unfairly maligned, no matter what it does.

Many aides were surprised that Pompeo's confirmation process seemed so shaky at certain points, given the White House's huge, upcoming foreign policy decisions on meeting with North Korea, keeping troops in Syria, and deciding the fate of the U.S.'s role in the Iran deal. The White House's Director of Legislative Affairs Marc Short devoted most of his time over the past few weeks to ensuring Pompeo got confirmed.

"We can only pick so many battles, and Pompeo has got to get done as quickly as possible," said one White House official.

Washington Times
https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/apr/27/steve-king-democrats-raised-the-standards-too-high/
Rep. Steve King: Democrats raised the standards too high for Cabinet appointments
By Sally Persons, 4/27/18

Rep. Steve King said Friday that Democrats have raised the standards too high for Cabinet appointments.

"The standards have been raised to a place here that I would say to the Democrats you better remember how you're conducting yourselves today because one day you might well be back in the majority and trying to confirm and sustain appointments to the Cabinet for a Democrat president," Mr. King, Iowa Republican, said on CNN.

He was referring to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt who appeared on Capitol Hill on Thursday. Mr. Pruitt answered questions for his behavior including pay raises for friends of his in the department.

Mr. King said Mr. Pruitt did not come out of the hearing "unseared," but he said Democrats ought to keep in mind that they are setting the standard for future Cabinet appointments and secretaries.

"If these standards are applied to the next president, it's going to be really hard to get anybody to serve in the next administration," Mr. King said.

Mr. Pruitt has also faced questions about his housing arrangement in Washington, where he was renting a nightly room from an energy lobbyist, and his travel expenses.