Message

From: POLITICO Pro Energy [politicoemail@politicopro.com]
Sent: 4/25/2018 9:56:16 AM
To: Wehrum, Bill [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=33d96ae800cf43a3911d94a7130b6c41-Wehrum, Wil]
Subject: Morning Energy: Perry's latest bid to save coal — NEPA focus of hearing today — More on the Pruitt front

By Kelsey Tamborrino | 04/25/2018 05:54 AM EDT

With help from Anthony Adragna

PERRY'S LATEST BID TO SAVE COAL: So far, Energy Secretary Rick Perry has had no success in his effort to construct a safety net to keep alive coal-fired and nuclear power plants threatened with shutdowns — a mission that's come straight from President Donald Trump. And Perry's latest potential gambit to use the 1950 Defense Production Act in hopes of designating the plants as crucial for national security may not fare better than his previous efforts, energy experts tell Pro's Eric Wolff.

Experts say the bid would stretch the definition of the law and almost certainly draw legal challenges. Plus invoking the act that was last used by the Obama administration to push advanced biofuels would probably hit a snag in Congress, since lawmakers would need to approve perhaps billions of dollars in funding to keep the plants afloat, the experts say.

Using the Korean War-era law to protect the plants could be a novel approach to aiding power plants, Eric writes, especially after Perry failed to gain FERC's support for his proposal to give the plants financial backing. And since Energy Department lawyers stymied a push last year to invoke the agency's authority under the Federal Power Act to force the plants to run, Perry and his staff appear to have very few viable options left.

But the fresh take on the act doesn't necessarily mean it'll work. "To me, it's a tough argument to make. It's a specious argument on its surface that seems like a perversion of the intended use of the Defense Production Act," said Tom Hicks, a former acting undersecretary of the U.S. Navy under former President Barack Obama and now a principal at the advisory firm The Mabus Group. Read more.

WELCOME TO WEDNESDAY! I'm your host Kelsey Tamborrino, and James Daniel was the first to guess the most recent senator to appear on a U.S. postage stamp. It was Maine's Margaret Chase Smith, who appeared during the Distinguished Americans Issue in 2007, worth a whopping 58 cents face value. A geography question for today: The Blue Nile and the White Nile combine to form the Nile River at which capital city? Send your tips, energy gossip and comments to ktamborrino@politico.com, or follow us on Twitter @kelseytam, @Morning_Energy and @POLITICOPro.

POLITICO's Ben White is bringing Morning Money to the Milken Institute Global Conference to provide coverage of the day's events and evening happenings. The newsletter will run April 29 — May 2, 2018. Sign up to keep up with your daily conference coverage.

DON'T FEAR THE NEPA? House Natural Resources will hold an oversight hearing this afternoon on what it calls the "weaponization" of the National Environmental Policy Act, and it could be a doozy. The committee notice calls NEPA — the seminal law that requires an environmental review on all federal actions — activists' "weapon of choice." Republicans have long-sought to undo parts of the law, and today's hearing will likely echo some of the rhetoric out of the Trump administration, which has supported faster NEPA reviews as part of its infrastructure push . The hearing will review challenges from NEPA and will evaluate reforms to "de-

weaponize" the law to "minimize opportunities for bad faith litigation, and restore the law to its original intent," according to a committee notice.

The committee previously took up the topic last year, holding a similar hearing in November on modernizing the law for the 21st century. James Coleman, a law professor at the Southern Methodist University, is expected to say the current NEPA process is "broken" and that bipartisan efforts to fix the problem have failed. "As President Obama's regulatory czar put it, 'If the permitting bureaucracy were a supervillain, it would be the Blob,'" he'll say, according to his testimony. "Right now, the Blob is winning: We have lost decades of investment while environment reviews grow longer and longer. How can we ensure that the U.S. does not fall behind our global competitors?"

Meanwhile, Laura Alice Watt of Sonoma State University, who says she is a proponent of environmental reviews that are conducted consistently, will discuss the effect of NEPA on the Point Reyes National Seashore, where a review over the last 20 years has contributed to the erosion of active ranches. Melissa Hamsher of Eclipse Energy Resource Corporation and former CEQ official Horst Greczmiel will also testify. Democratic Rep. Donald McEachin , ranking member of the Oversight subcommittee, will say that he'll hold the administration and Republicans to account on NEPA. "Many communities — and especially vulnerable minority and low-income communities — have had to endure a decades-long pattern of environmental injustice, in no small part because they were denied a say in important decisions that affected them," McEachin is expected to say. **If you go:** The hearing kicks off at 2 p.m. in 1324 Longworth.

SPEAKING OF NEPA: The League of Conservation Voters sent this letter to House members Tuesday urging them to oppose H.R. 3144 (115), which LCV says would "attack" the Endangered Species Act and NEPA by "mandating dam operations harmful to endangered salmon and steelhead in the Pacific Northwest."

ADD THIS TO THE LIST: Two days before two House hearings and fresh off an announcement on EPA's plan to bar scientific studies that don't publicly disclose data, Administrator Scott Pruitt got another appointment to testify on his agency's budget. This time Pruitt will appear in May before the Senate appropriations subcommittee that oversees EPA's budget, Lisa Murkowski said Tuesday.

OH, TO BE A FLY ON THE WALL: Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, one of the Republican EPW members open to a hearing with Pruitt, told ME Tuesday she has a "well-timed" phone call with him scheduled for this week. "I think he wants to talk about some regulatory measures," she said. "But I'm going to probably ask him questions on the current state of some of the things that I've read and we'll see where it goes." She said the call had been set up last week.

McConnell voices support ... again: Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told reporters Tuesday he remained a supporter of Pruitt's, while noting the EPA chief's busy Thursday on the Hill. "We'll just see," he said. "I expect there will be a lot of interest."

PERROTTA WORKED FOR TRUMP-BACKED MEDIA COMPANY: Pasquale "Nino" Perrotta — the Secret Service veteran who heads Pruitt's security detail — previously worked on assignments for the tabloid publishing company American Media Inc. during the 2016 presidential campaign, The New York Times reported Tuesday. While it is unclear when Perrotta started working at AMI, the Times reports some of his activities at the company included physical security, cybersecurity and investigative services involving litigation. Read more.

OLD AD-AGE: The Natural Resources Defense Council is sponsoring an ad today in The Washington Post that calls for Pruitt's ouster. The ad — which says: "President Trump promised to drain the swamp. He should start with EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt" — will run as an insert in 3,000 copies of the Post and will be delivered to Capitol Hill on Thursday. See it.

IF YOU PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT: The Environmental Defense Fund mapped out what it says are Pruitt's unanswered questions surrounding scandals while he helms EPA and during his time as Oklahoma attorney general — 86 of them to be exact. The group will also hand out a deck of "Non Trivial Pruitt Questions" during Thursday's hearings with a sampling of the ethical questions. See the cards here.

Rally cry: Separately, the American Federation of Government Employees will hold a rally today from noon until 1 p.m. in support of EPA workers. Democratic Reps. Salud Carbajal, Don Beyer, Bill Foster, Sheila Jackson Lee, Alan Lowenthal, Grace Meng, Jamie Raskin and Debbie Wasserman Schultz are all set to attend the rally, which will take place outside of EPA headquarters.

MACRON ADDRESS LAWMAKERS: French President Emmanuel Macron hits the Hill this morning to address a joint session of Congress. Earlier this week, the French president said he'd call for continued U.S. intervention in Syria in his speech. "I will advocate for multilateralism," Macron said in an interview on "Fox News Sunday." But it's also possible issues concerning climate will come up — which would likely receive a welcome reception from Democrats.

Macron, a staunch supporter of the Paris accord, also briefly mentioned climate during a joint press conference with the president Tuesday. "We also talked about the climate. And here, also, we know where we stand," Macron said vaguely. "France will continue to work on major pieces, including the global compact for the environment. But I think I can say that our economic — our businesses, our researchers can continue to work on — can create solutions in the field." Both he and Trump are "attached to that," he said.

Bold move: It's probably not an indication of environmental topics to come, but Apple CEO Tim Cook brought former EPA chief Lisa Jackson to Tuesday's state dinner with Macron. Jackson, who now works as vice president of environment, policy and social initiatives at Apple, has attended events with Cook in the past — but it's an interesting move considering Jackson's not been known to mince words about the Trump administration. For what its worth, Cook will meet today with Trump in the Oval Office.

MORE NOMS: Trump sent James Hubbard's nomination to be undersecretary of Agriculture for natural resources and the environment to the Senate Tuesday. Hubbard, of Colorado, replaces Robert Bonnie, who resigned from the post.

DEMOCRATS CITE SAFETY: Three Energy and Commerce Democratic leaders on Tuesday called on the Government Accountability Office to probe EPA's enforcement of federal health and environmental safeguards. "We are concerned that President Trump's and Administrator Pruitt's policies to 'streamline' permitting processes, reduce regulatory 'burdens' for industry, and defer to states on enforcement will lead to more environmental law violations due to lax enforcement at both the state and federal level," ranking member Frank Pallone and Reps. Diana DeGette and Paul Tonko write in a letter to GAO Comptroller Gene Dodaro. Read it here.

MAIL CALL! GOING NUCLEAR: Former national security officials and nonproliferation experts will send this letter today to congressional foreign affairs leadership stating that for national security reasons, it is in the U.S.' best interest to have a nuclear cooperation agreement — a so-called 123 Agreement — with Saudi Arabia.

— **Democratic Sens. Maria Cantwell and Jeff Merkley** and Reps. Raúl Grijalva and Jared Huffman sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Tuesday, calling on him to undo plans for a 2019 lease sale in Alaska's Beaufort Sea. Read it here.

— **Sen. John Barrasso, chairman of the Senate EPW Committee and Capito,** subcommittee chairwoman on clean air and nuclear safety, sent a letter to Pruitt and Perry, asking them to protect the confidential business information of U.S. small refineries. Read the letter here.

AT IT AGAIN: Michigan GOP Rep. Fred Upton officially filed for reelection in the state's 6th District, MLive reports. "We are full steam ahead and excited about the future," the Energy and Commerce lawmaker said in a statement.

A TANGLED WEB: The Environmental Data & Governance Initiative is out with a new monitoring report this morning that says EPA removed pages related to "international priorities" and "international grants and cooperative agreements," as well as corresponding links, from its International Cooperation web page. The page in question listed priority areas including "strong environmental institutions," "climate change" and "clean water," among other terms, which EDGI says were removed in December 2017. Read the report here and see screenshots here.

GROUPS TO SUE OVER DRINKING WATER IN NEW JERSEY: The NRDC and Newark Education Workers Caucus say they will sue the city of Newark, N.J., and Catherine McCabe, the acting commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, over lead contamination in the city's drinking water, Pro New Jersey's Danielle Muoio reports. A Newark city official said Tuesday that the complaint filed by the groups is "absolutely and outrageously false."

OLYMPIANS HEAD TO HILL FOR CLIMATE: Five Winter Olympians will brief House and Senate offices today on the impact of climate change on winter sports and outdoor recreation. Cross-country skier Jessie Diggins, freestyle skier David Wise, halfpipe snowboarder Arielle Gold, biathlete Maddie Phaneuf and alpine skier Stacey Cook all will appear on the panel, which is co-hosted by nonprofit Protect Our Winters, Citizens Climate Lobby, and Sens. Michael Bennet and Susan Collins. **If you go** : The briefing begins at 12:30 p.m. in 538 Dirksen.

CORRECTION: The April 24 edition of Morning Energy misstated the purpose of H.R. 3144 (115). The bill would codify the 2014 Biological Opinion until 2022, while the NEPA and the environmental impact statement processes continue.

QUICK HITS

— Trump White House offered to help prep Pruitt for hearings. EPA told the White House to "get lost," The New York Times.

— Shaheen questions Air Force secretary on PFAS health study, Seacoast Online.

— Harassment targeted; more disciplinary actions could follow, E&E News.

— Provisions in FAA bill could strip endangered species protections, The Hill.

— Zinke put birther conspiracy theorist on super PAC board, CNN.

— Mines owned by Gov. Justice missed deadline for installing safety tech, Charleston Gazette-Mail.

HAPPENING TODAY

8:30 a.m. — Microsoft and the delegation of the European Union to the U.S. discussion on the future of the EU electricity market, 901 K Street NW

10:00 a.m. — Senate Commerce Committee hearing on "Enhancing the Marine Mammal Protection Act," 253 Russell

11:30 a.m. — The World Resources Institute forum on "activism for energy," 10 G Street NE

12:30 p.m. — Olympians brief Congress about impact of climate change on winter sports, 538 Dirksen

2:00 p.m. — Resources for the Future webinar on "What Research Says on Key Fracking Debate Issues."

2:00 p.m. — House Natural Resources Committee hearing on "The Weaponization of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Implications of Environmental Lawfare," 1324 Longworth

2:00 p.m. — Senate Appropriations Energy and Water Development Subcommittee hearing on proposed budget estimates and justification for FY 2019 for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, 430 Dirksen

2:00 p.m. — The Heritage Foundation discussion on "Saving 'Endangered' Species or Regulating with Bad Data," 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE

2:30 p.m. — Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearing on a pair of bills, including H.R. 1491 (115), 628 Dirksen

3:30 p.m. — Bloomberg Government and the Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce conversation on "Investing In A Sustainable Energy Future," New York City

5:30 p.m. — The National Academy of Sciences lecture on "Distress Signals: Historical Waypoints in Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Since 1850," 2101 Constitution Avenue NW

6:30 p.m. — The Carnegie Institution for Science lecture on the sustainable use of the ocean, 1530 P Street NW

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Stories from POLITICO Pro

Perry's latest bid to help coal faces uphill battle Back

By Eric Wolff | 04/25/2018 05:08 AM EDT

Energy Secretary Rick Perry's latest idea to protect coal-fired and nuclear power plants may not fare much better than his previous efforts, according to energy experts.

Perry is considering invoking the 1950 Defense Production Act to keep money-losing power plants running by designating them as crucial for national security. But that would stretch the definition of the law and almost certainly draw legal challenges — and it would hit a big hurdle in Congress, which would need to approve perhaps billions of dollars in funding to keep the plants afloat, the experts said.

At the urging of President Donald Trump, Perry has sought to keep open coal and nuclear power plants that are threatened with shutdowns amid the stagnant demand for power — and even as natural gas and renewable power sources grab a growing share of the market.

So far, Perry's had no luck. FERC earlier this year rejected his proposal to give the plants financial support, and Energy Department lawyers stymied a push last year to invoke the agency's authority under the Federal Power Act to force the plants to run.

Some experts said any attempt to use the DPA is likely to meet the same fate.

"To me, it's a tough argument to make. It's a specious argument on its surface that seems like a perversion of the intended use of the Defense Production Act," said Tom Hicks, a former acting undersecretary of the Navy under former President Barack Obama and now a principal at the advisory firm The Mabus Group. "Defense Production Act is on the vanguard of the need for resources, not on the back end for an industry being challenged by economic forces."

But the effort has been a priority for Trump and Perry, who sees saving coal-fired power generation as vital to U.S. security, according to a source familiar with the conversations on the issue.

The Cold War-era law grants the federal government powerful authorities to inject cash into companies essential for national defense in order to preserve domestic supplies of key products. But DOE will have to make the case that electricity produced specifically from coal and nuclear power plants, and not other types of power, is a critical resource.

Using the act to protect the plants when there appeared to be no immediate shortage of power supplies would be a novel application that would almost certainly face legal challenge.

"If the administration uses DPA, they're going to be using it very creatively," said Ari Peskoe, director of the Electricity Law Initiative at the Harvard Law School Environmental and Energy Law Program. "They may come up with reasoning for higher rates and who's going to pay for it. Whether that will hold up, I don't know."

Perry and his staff appear to have very few viable options for bailing out coal and nuclear power, a major energy priority for Trump, who has promised to revive the coal industry. DOE has opened a comments process for interested parties to weigh in on its use of the Federal Power Act's 202(c) emergency provisions, though that would require the agency to go through FERC, which unanimously rejected a similar Perry effort in January.

The 202(c) effort has been pushed by coal magnate Bob Murray, owner of Murray Energy, and by FirstEnergy Solutions, the unit of of FirstEnergy Corp. that is in bankruptcy proceedings and which expects to shut down four coal and nuclear power plants. That company asked DOE to use the emergency authority to save not only its plants, but all 85 coal and nuclear power plants in the PJM Interconnection power market.

The DPA was last used by the Obama administration starting in 2012 to help spur the biofuels industry to develop the kind of advanced biofuels that could power ships and aircraft. The government can purchase capital equipment for the cause of national security, and it can fund advertising to support the effort.

And it allows the government to become the buyer of last resort, which could put Washington on the hook to buy excess power generated by coal and nuclear plants. Technically, this electricity could only be purchased at the "cost of production," a level that in the past has been determined by a team within the Defense Department.

While no hard estimate for the cost of a DPA subsidy exists, consultants analyzing Perry's previous bailout proposal estimated costs between $4 billion and $10.6 billion annually.

That's a far higher level than Congress typically allocates for the DPA. It provided $67.4 million in the omnibus passed in March, H.R. 1625 (115), down slightly from the $76 million it provided for all projects in 2017, according to a report submitted to Congress.

And Congress — and the Republican Party — is deeply divided on using government subsidies to save these plants. Rep. David McKinley (R-W.Va.) has some allies from other coal districts for the effort, but other free market-oriented lawmakers like Rep. Pete Olson (R-Texas) say they want to see markets function unimpeded.

McKinley's staff has been in touch with DOE and the White House, as has West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin (D).

"I think it's an emergency national concern for the national defense of our country. I think Rick Perry agrees with it, and I think the president does also," Manchin told POLITICO.

PJM has itself said the retirement of FirstEnergy's coal plants did not pose a threat to the region's power supplies, and that it had ample generation to meet demand. It has opposed any effort to mandate to require the plants to stay online.

"We believe that a market-oriented approach consistent with the American free-enterprise system offers better results than government-mandated subsidies," said PJM spokesman Jeff Shields.

Anthony Adragna contributed to this report.

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Pruitt scales back EPA's use of science Back

By Emily Holden and Annie Snider | 04/24/2018 03:28 PM EDT

Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt announced Tuesday he would seek to bar the agency from relying on studies that don't publicly disclose all their data, a major policy change that has long been sought by conservatives that will sharply reduce the research the agency can rely on when crafting new regulations.

The unveiling of the proposed rule delivers a win to Republicans like House Science Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas), who unsuccessfully pushed legislation to impose the same type of change. The move also demonstrates Pruitt's persistence in pursuing President Donald Trump's anti-regulation agenda just two days before the embattled EPA chief is due to face fierce questioning from lawmakers about his hefty spending, expanded security detail and cheap condominium rental from the wife of an energy lobbyist.

At an invitation-only meeting at EPA headquarters with Smith, Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and other supporters of the policy, Pruitt said the proposed rule was critical in ensuring that the agency was transparent about how it is making decisions to justify costly new regulations. It is the latest step Pruitt has taken to fundamentally shift the agency's approach to science.

"It is a codification of an approach that says as we do our business at the agency the science that we use is going to be transparent, it's going to be reproduceable, it's going to be able to be analyzed by those in the marketplace. And those who watch what we do can make informed decisions about whether we've drawn the proper conclusions or not," Pruitt said.

Text of the proposed rule was not immediately available.

The proposal, based on legislation pushed by Smith, is intensely controversial, and scientists and public health groups say it will prevent federal regulators from enacting health and safety protections. Nearly 1,000 scientists, including former EPA career staffers, signed a letter opposing the policy sent by the Union of Concerned Scientists to Pruitt on Monday.

Their primary concern was that many of the country's bedrock air and water quality regulations are based on research that cannot disclose raw data because it includes the personal health information.

But industry has its own version of the same problem. EPA often relies on industry studies that are considered by companies to be confidential business information when determining whether new pesticides and toxic chemicals are safe to use. Internal EPA emails obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that EPA political officials, including Nancy Beck, who became the chief of the agency's chemical safety office last year after working for years at a chemical industry lobbying group, worried that the new policy would limit the agency's ability to consider industry data or would force companies to make this proprietary data public.

"We will need to thread this one real tight!" Richard Yamada, political official who led work on the new policy wrote to Beck after she raised the concerns.

It was not immediately clear if the new proposed rule included measures to address those concerns.

Rush Holt, CEO of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, said Pruitt's changes could keep the agency from revising public health regulations as problems arise or new data comes to light.

"On the surface it sounds so innocuous or even beneficial. What could be wrong with transparency? Well it's clear to me that this is not based on an effort to be transparent. It is rather based on an effort to be just the opposite," he said.

"EPA is particularly important because when science is misused, people die," he added.

Pruitt has been discussing the new scientific policy publicly for weeks, but it only went to the White House for interagency review last week. Such swift review is very rare for the Office of Management and Budget, which often takes months to vet a new policy. At least one group, the Environmental Defense Fund, has requested a meeting with OMB officials to discuss the rule, but OMB's website shows that no meetings have been scheduled with interested groups.

Many public health studies can't be replicated without exposing people to contaminants, and environmental disasters such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill cannot be recreated, the group said, raising intellectual property, proprietary and privacy concerns.

Pruitt's predecessor Gina McCarthy, and her air chief Janet McCabe, in an op-ed in The New York Times in March said concerns about studies are dealt with through the existing peer-review process, which ensures scientific integrity.

"[Pruitt] and some conservative members of Congress are setting up a nonexistent problem in order to prevent the E.P.A. from using the best available science," they said.

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Murkowski: Pruitt will testify to Senate appropriators Back

By Anthony Adragna | 04/24/2018 03:03 PM EDT

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is scheduled to testify in May before the Senate appropriations subcommittee that oversees his budget, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), who chairs the panel, said today.

Murkowski did not elaborate on her plans for the hearing or how much it would delve into Pruitt's ethics and spending. But she said it was "absolutely appropriate" for the Environment and Public Works Committee to hold an oversight hearing on the administrator's conduct in office, an idea that has been endorsed by multiple Republicans on the authorization committee.

"I'm hoping they move on it sooner than later," Murkowski said of the EPW committee.

EPW Chairman John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) said today he has "serious questions" about how Pruitt has handled taxpayer dollars but stopped short of announcing plans for Pruitt to testify.

"We'll see what comes out of the hearings this Thursday," Barrasso said, referring to Pruitt's scheduled appearance of two House hearings that day.

Barrasso said he planned to send additional letters to EPA, following his recent request for details on the administrator's use of four separate email accounts. In response to that earlier letter, EPA told him all of Pruitt's accounts are searched in response to public records requests.

"You want to make sure taxpayers are getting value for their dollars," Barrasso told reporters today. "We want to make sure money is being spent appropriately."

WHAT'S NEXT: Murkowski declined to say when Pruitt would appear before her Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, but she has said previously it was expected to be the week of May 7.

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Pruitt support in Senate erodes as GOP lawmakers seek hearings Back

By Anthony Adragna | 04/23/2018 08:32 PM EDT

Scott Pruitt's wall of GOP support is developing new cracks, with three key Senate defenders calling for hearings into the embattled EPA administrator's recent controversies — and Sen. Lisa Murkowski announcing Tuesday that she plans to bring him before her appropriations panel in May.

Three other Republicans, including staunch Pruitt ally Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), told POLITICO on Monday that they would also support hearings by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to look into the former Oklahoma attorney general's actions. Their words came as Pruitt, who has managed to hold onto President Donald Trump's public support for now, faces a pair of House hearings Thursday that could be make-or-break for his hopes of remaining in the Cabinet.

"I think that a couple of us on the committee think it's appropriate to have a hearing in so far as any accusation having to do with his office is concerned," Inhofe told POLITICO.

Inhofe said he was troubled by a report over the weekend in The New York Times detailing a sweetheart deal Pruitt received on an Oklahoma City home previously owned by a lobbyist while serving in a state government. The Oklahoma Republican declined to discuss which allegations he found disturbing, but said "there are some things in there that I'd like to check out and see."

Joining his call for a Senate hearing were two other senior GOP members of the EPW panel, Sens. Shelley Moore Capito (W.Va.) and John Boozman (Ark.).

"Most people have concerns about some of the allegations," Boozman said. "At some point he'll be before the committee and we'll dig deeper and see exactly what's going on."

EPW Chairman John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) said Tuesday that he has "serious questions" about how Pruitt has handled taxpayer dollars, but he stopped short of announcing plans for Pruitt to testify.

"We want to make sure money is being spent appropriately," Barrasso said.

Murkowski (R-Alaska), who chairs the subcommittee that oversees EPA's appropriations, did not elaborate on her plans for her own hearing with Pruitt, or how much it would delve into his ethics and spending. But she said it would be "absolutely appropriate" for Barrasso's panel to hold an oversight hearing on the administrator's conduct in office, an idea that multiple Republicans on the authorization committee have endorsed.

"I'm hoping they move on it sooner than later," Murkowski said of the EPW Committee.

To date, four House Republicans have called on Pruitt to resign, along with scores of elected Democrats. And Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), has said Pruitt was "the wrong person" to lead the agency based on his policies.

Pruitt has drawn criticism about his ethics and lavish spending in recent months. Three congressional committees, the White House and EPA's inspector general are all probing his behavior, ranging from his security expenses, high pay raises for aides, first-class travel and meetings with a coal group.

The House Oversight Committee has requested interviews with five senior agency aides. The White House said it would formally investigate Pruitt's expenses after the Government Accountability Office last week found EPA broke the law by failing to notify Congress about a $43,000 privacy booth Pruitt had built in his office.

Pruitt will go to the Hill on Thursday to testify before a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee in the morning and at a House Appropriations subpanel in the afternoon. Those appearances will mark his first time before Congress since the recent allegations broke.

Both Inhofe and Capito said they thought those House hearings would prove pivotal for Pruitt's long-term future in the administration.

"It's really important," Capito said. "He's going to have to answer some tough questions. I'm sure they'll be put to him by both sides and we'll see what his response is."

Meanwhile, EPW ranking member Tom Carper (D-Del.) said he had a good conversation with House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) regarding Pruitt, but he said there was no formal bipartisan agreement to work together on an investigation.

"I just gave him plenty of encouragement that he's doing the right thing," he said.

But the mounting public criticism from Republicans suggests GOP lawmakers' patience in defending the EPA chief's behavior is waning.

"Some of the things that he's done and that he's been alleged to do are just indefensible," Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) said. "You just can't put lipstick on those pigs. You can't."

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French president to call for American role in Syria Back

By Ian Kullgren | 04/22/2018 10:03 AM EDT

French President Emmanuel Macron said Sunday he will call for continued U.S. intervention in Syria before a joint session of Congress this week.

"I will advocate for multilateralism," Macron said in an interview on "Fox News Sunday."

Macron is visiting Washington this week in the first official state visit of the Trump presidency. In an interview with Chris Wallace at the presidential palace in Paris, Macron said he has a "special relationship" with President Donald Trump, describing them both as political outsiders.

"Both of us are probably the maverick of the systems on both sides," Macron said. "President Trump's election was unexpected in your country and probably my election was unexpected in my country."

Macron said that the United States is still an indispensable player for achieving peace in the Middle East, adding that France will rely on the U.S. in Syria once the conflict comes to an end.

"We will have to build a new Syria afterwards," he said.

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Apple's Tim Cook attending White House state dinner for Macron Back

By POLITICO Pro Staff | 04/24/2018 07:15 PM EDT

Apple CEO Tim Cook is attending tonight's White House state dinner for French President Emmanuel Macron.

Cook was spotted arriving for the dinner with former EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, who is now vice president of environment, policy and social initiatives for Apple, according to a pool report.

Jackson served as head of the EPA under former President Barack Obama.

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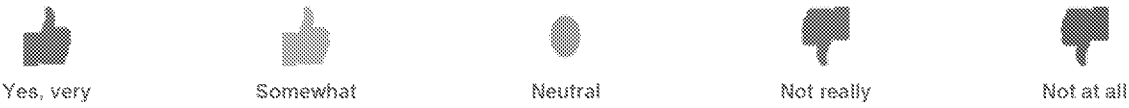

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