



INDEPENDENT

Trump administration eyes scientist who downplays climate change for top NOAA job

‘Seriously, who is he? What is his scientific expertise?’ asked one climate scientist

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A successor has been named for the position of chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), according to reports.

Dr Ryan Maue, a meteorologist at a private weather forecasting and consulting company in Atlanta, Georgia, has been tipped to take the top federal position.

While Dr Maue acknowledges that human activities have contributed to climate change, on social media and in op-eds, he regularly criticizes “climate alarmists” and tough policy measures to tackle the global crisis.

He earned his Ph.D in meteorology at Florida State University and was previously an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, a think-tank co-founded by billionaire Charles Koch, who made a fortune in the fossil fuel industry.

The NOAA posting was first reported by the Washington Post. Neither the agency nor the Department of Commerce, which oversees it, responded to a request for comment from *The Independent*.

The meteorologist did not respond to an email seeking an interview from *The Independent*. If he is confirmed after security and ethics reviews, he will replace Craig McLean, who is acting chief scientist at NOAA.

The role is consequential, at one of the country’s leading government climate research agencies. The chief scientist oversees climate issues but also water, satellites and modeling. Weather is another issue on the agenda - where he brings expertise in tropical cyclones and hurricanes.

However climate scientists expressed concerns that the political appointment would “advance the agenda of climate deniers” in an administration which has been notoriously anti-science and rolled back dozens of climate and environmental rules.

Michael Mann, a distinguished professor of atmospheric sciences at Penn State and National Academy of Sciences member, told *The Independent*: "At a time when we are witnessing the devastating impacts of climate change-amplified extreme weather events, including wildfires out west and a record hurricane season here back east, it would have previously seemed

unimaginable that an administration would appoint an individual with a record of denying and downplaying these impacts to a position of leadership at the very agency tasked with assessing the risks we face from extreme weather events.

“I have no idea who this person is. ... I suspect that he has the one and only necessary qualification for the job: A willingness to advance the agenda of climate deniers.”

Dr Maue penned an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* in 2018 with Patrick J. Michaels, a member of the CO2 Coalition, a pro-fossil fuel nonprofit with close ties to the Trump administration.

In the piece, they claimed that testimony given by NASA climate scientist James Hansen, who warned a Senate committee more than 30 years ago about the dangers of climate change, had not borne out in reality.

“On the 30th anniversary of Mr. Hansen’s galvanizing testimony, it’s time to acknowledge that the rapid warming he predicted isn’t happening. Climate researchers and policy makers should adopt the more modest forecasts that are consistent with observed temperatures,” Maue and Michaels wrote in the WSJ.

“That would be a lukewarm policy, consistent with a lukewarming planet.”

However Dr Hansen’s projections, which have faced peer review, have stood up. And according to the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) Special Report, major policy shifts must be made this decade to curb global warming to 1.5C as beyond which, scientists believe, many changes to earth systems will be irreversible.

Dr Maue has also shown that he’s not afraid to wade into politics on social media (although a number of tweets now appear to have been deleted from his Twitter feed but are still available in cache mode).

He tweeted last week: “Biden hits Trump on climate: Western fires foreshadow 'unending barrage of tragedies' Shameless but it's their political strategy to blame Trump for all natural disasters past, present, and future.”

But he’s also shared critiques, albeit more measured, of President Trump. Last year, Mr Trump displayed a forecast map for Hurricane Dorian with what appeared to be a hand-drawn, half-circle that extended the cone of uncertainty over a swath of Alabama after Mr Trump erroneously tweeted that the storm would “hit (much) harder than anticipated” in the state.

Following the bizarre incident, now known as “Sharpiegate”, Dr Maue told AP that it was important for the president’s tweets to be accurate if he wants to provide helpful information to the public facing a potential emergency.

He said the problem with the president’s tweet came from sending out stale information.

“If he’s going to be a provider of up-to-date information, he needs to be up to date,” he said.