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## How a climate skeptic marginalized for years at the Interior Dept. rose to prominence under Trump

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Just 10 days after President Trump took office last year, an Interior Department official suggested a swift change to its website in preparation for Trump's choice to lead the department, Ryan Zinke.

While Zinke wouldn't be sworn in for weeks, Office of Policy Analysis senior adviser Indur Goklany emailed Doug Domenech — a Trump appointee who would become the Interior Department's assistant secretary of insular areas — telling him they would “be doing the new Secretary a favor if ... the current ‘Our Priorities’ page visible on the DOI home page were removed before he is confirmed.”

Unlike Domenech and some of the other Interior officials who were taking a fresh look at the department's policies and messaging, Goklany wasn't a new arrival. He had been working at the Interior Department since Ronald Reagan was president and had spent years questioning whether climate change would damage the planet as much as some of his colleagues predicted.

Goklany, who often goes by the nickname “Goks,” has written papers for several conservative think tanks as well as participated in their events and films while working at the Office of Policy Analysis for more than 30 years. Weeks after Trump's inauguration, he found himself within the inner circle of the Interior Department's leadership. He weighed in on climate change discussions, attended meetings with some of Zinke's senior aides and began working in the office of the deputy secretary.

Goklany's transition from an Interior backbencher to someone with access to key decision-makers highlights a regular bureaucratic ritual that has attracted little notice under this administration: When a new president comes to power, civil servants aligned with the administration can suddenly gain prominence. Plenty of federal employees might be seething since Trump's arrival, but others have welcomed it and are thriving.

A batch of emails newly released under the Freedom of Information Act, coupled with interviews with current and former federal officials and academics, chart the ascent of a longtime

Interior analyst who had established his conservative bona fides outside the department as he feuded with some of his colleagues within.

As Goklany began suggesting an overhaul of the Interior Department's website, he explained to Domenech in a Jan. 27 email that he was making "revisions that would be technically and scientifically more accurate than what's currently on it, and also provide context, which the current one doesn't."

Three days later, he proposed wiping out the page in question altogether.

"I actually think removing the Priorities page is better and more efficient than just modifying certain pages because climate change is not the only questionable priority on the current Priorities page," Goklany wrote.

Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift said Friday that she had been informed by the department's human resources office that she could not comment on Goklany's role.

Myron Ebell, a senior fellow at the conservative Competitive Enterprise Institute who headed Trump's transition team at the Environmental Protection Agency and has worked with Goklany for years in what Ebell described as his "moonlighting job as a one-man think tank," said his longtime ally has been empowered in a way he hasn't been since the Reagan administration.

"Obviously they kept him in a box during the Obama administration, and now they've let him loose," said Ebell, who lobbied the president to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement. "He's a national treasure, in my view. He's a very meticulous analyst of policies, and he knows how to get behind the claims and look at the data."

Others with knowledge of the agency — including Joel Clement, who headed the Office of Policy Analysis from January 2011 until July 2017 — said in an email that he fails to understand why the new leadership at the Interior Department would rely on someone with a background in electrical engineering to help guide climate policy.

"A climate change denier is someone who rejects the multiple lines of corroborating scientific evidence that show that rapid change is real, it's caused by human activities, and it's extremely dangerous," Clement said. "For an electrical engineer to suggest that climate change is good for society and is just dandy, there are lots of nonexperts with opinions; the bizarre thing is that sitting political appointees in the Department of the Interior would seek out his advice."

Throughout his career at the department — Goklany joined the Office of Policy Analysis in 1986 — he has questioned the severity of climate change's effects, the extent to which humans have contributed to it and the predictions of its future course. Under both the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, Goklany weighed in on international climate reports in his personal and professional capacity.

Michael MacCracken, who took a leave from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to work as senior global change scientist at the interagency Office of the U.S. Global Change Research Program from 1993 to 2002, recalled in an interview Thursday that Goklany frequently

submitted comments on behalf of the Interior Department that suggested the United States could adapt to climate-change effects more easily than many scientists projected.

As officials worked on the official Climate Action Report that the Bush administration released in 2002, Goklany wrote a Nov. 13, 2001, memo in which he said that the federal government should jettison phrases the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change used to describe possible climate impacts — “likely” and “very likely,” which have a numerical probability attached to them — in favor of “might,” “may” or “could.”

“We are skeptical of the methodology used to grade different levels of possibilities,” Goklany wrote.

In the end, Harlan Watson, the State Department’s special envoy to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, who had co-authored a paper with Goklany, overruled him and said the administration should preserve words such as “likely” and “very likely.”

“He was very persistent,” said MacCracken, chief scientist for climate change programs with the D.C.-based Climate Institute, adding that he and others outlined in writing their reasons for rejecting aspects of Goklany’s critiques. “I was lucky being relatively senior and a scientist in the process, so could go back at him.”

Goklany also regularly worked with conservative think tanks skeptical of climate change, publishing two books with the Cato Institute and speaking on panels held by the Heartland Institute. In 2012, Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva (Ariz.), now ranking Democrat of the House Natural Resources Committee, called for a probe into whether Goklany improperly received a \$1,000-per-month payment from the Heartland Institute for writing a chapter in a book on climate science.

Goklany asked to stop working on climate change at the Interior Department after Barack Obama took office. Clement, who supervised him, said he filed the FOIA request that produced the raft of emails related to Goklany’s activities “because he refused to discuss these activities with his supervisors while I was there at DOI, and his work products, a mystery to all of us in the career ranks, were likely to represent threats to scientific integrity.”

The documents chronicle how Goklany reached out to new appointees in key positions and shared work he had done that meshed with Trump and Zinke’s push for expanded fossil fuel production.

“It was a pleasure to meet you last evening,” Goklany wrote Downey Magallanes, Zinke’s deputy chief of staff, in a March 10, 2017, email, attaching two papers he had written “as an Independent Scientist” on the benefits of fossil fuels and carbon dioxide, respectively. “I hope to run into you from time to time.”

Goklany asked for permission in March 2017 from Interior’s Ethics Office to speak at the Heartland Institute’s International Conference on Climate Change. Goklany told a lawyer there that he wanted to speak only in a “personal capacity,” noting that he “worked on climate change matters for over 20 years until about 2009.”

At the conference, Heartland introduced Goklany as an “independent scientist,” without referring to his Interior Department post. He posited correlations between rising atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and indicators of well-being, such as life expectancy and the per capita gross domestic product.

“Instead of living in the worst of times, we’re actually living in the best of times,” Goklany said, “and carbon dioxide and fossil fuels are a good part of that.”

Top officials at the Interior Department welcomed Goklany’s input. While Clement had been exploring whether to move Goklany to the department’s ethics office, the analyst sought instead to work directly with Associate Deputy Secretary James Cason on policy matters. The job discussions came as Zinke’s aides were orchestrating a department-wide reassignment of Senior Executive Service employees, such as Goklany, Clement and others from around the country. In June, they reassigned 33 of those staffers.

While the vast majority received their new postings without providing input, an email exchange in April shows that Zinke’s aides solicited Goklany’s views on where he should work. Goklany informed Domenech that Clement was seeking to detail him to an ethics assignment, noting: “The theory is an SES-er can do anything. But I’d rather not!”

Domenech consulted with the department’s principal deputy solicitor, Daniel Jorjani, and then informed Goklany that he had told a colleague “to slow-walk action moving you to Ethics.”

Instead, Cason in May approved Goklany’s transfer to work in the office of the deputy secretary, though Clement said Interior officials refused to sign the paperwork making the detail official. According to copies of Cason’s schedule obtained by the advocacy group Friends of the Earth under FOIA, Goklany attended 19 meetings with Cason between April 5, 2017, and Jan. 16, 2018. Only eight of the sessions list topics, and two of them are focused on climate change.

Even before moving under Cason, in April Goklany procured the Obama administration’s fiscal year 2013 climate budget for Cason and Domenech as the Trump team was preparing to roll out its first congressional budget request, which consolidated climate activities within the Interior Department. Later that month, Domenech sent Goklany an Obama-era National Park Service brochure on the effects of global warming throughout the parks. Goklany marked up the document with his thoughts, describing a page titled “Responding to Climate Change” as “propaganda for a favored option.”

Goklany also interpreted media coverage of climate for high-level Interior officials. He described a Los Angeles Times article about California’s brutal wildfire season as “better than most” while deriding a New York Times story about the impact of sea-level rise and other climate effects on Guam by arguing that “tide gauge data, however, doesn’t show any acceleration in sea level rise due to man-made global warming or whatever.”

By May, Goklany was reviewing a draft of at least one U.S. Geological Survey paper on climate change and preparing “a summary overview of climate change activities gleaned from examining web presence,” remarking on the volume of climate communication done by Obama’s Interior Department.

“I estimate that there are over 100,000 pages on the web on DOI servers (including bureaus) that refer to climate change!” he wrote to Cason.

Late last year, Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt signed a secretarial order wiping out four directives and policy manuals instructing Interior employees on how to address climate and other environmental impacts on public lands, including at least one Goklany singled out to Cason in May. The order said the documents were “inconsistent” with the administration’s energy goals.