

A Climate Change Doubter Will Overhaul the EPA in Trump's Administration

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November 15, 2016

In a novel twist on letting the fox guard the hen house, Republican President-elect Donald Trump has turned to a renowned climate change denier to help reorganize and possibly lead the Environmental Protection Agency.

Trump, who once dismissed global warming as a “hoax,” has rejected a large body of scientific research pointing to an environmental catastrophe in the making unless world leaders make good on their carbon-reduction pledges over the coming decade.

His choice to supervise the transition at the EPA and possibly lead the agency in a diametrically opposite direction from current policy is Myron Ebell, a senior official of the Libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute and a Washington fixture who for decades has stubbornly challenged climate change science.

Although he holds degrees from Colorado College and the London School of Economics, Ebell is not a trained scientist but instead is a quick study who has made a name for himself by taking a contrarian view to the latest scientific pronouncements.

On Twitter, he proudly calls himself “#1 enemy of climate change alarmism.” Ebell has acknowledged in the past that, all things being equal, “if you add CO₂ to the atmosphere, you’ll get a little warming.” But as he quickly added during a 2007 interview with *Vanity Fair*, the warming has been “very modest and well within the range of natural variability.”

The unflappable Ebell also chairs something called the “Cooler Head Coalition,” which consists of about 25 non-profit groups in the U.S. and overseas that question global warming and the threat of sea elevation, as well as the need for aggressive carbon emission reduction policies that they complain would stunt economic growth.

The Washington Post reported that Ebell has long argued for opening up more federal lands to oil and gas exploration, logging and coal mining while shifting responsibility for permitting that action from the federal government to the states. He is an avowed opponent of what he calls “energy rationing,” or minimizing the exploitation of domestic energy sources that could spur the economy. Over the years, his conservative think tank based in Northern Virginia received millions of dollars in funding from ExxonMobil and other energy companies.

Ebell isn't afraid to take anyone on. When Pope Francis last year wrote in an encyclical the "urgent challenge" to protect the world's natural resources, *The Post* noted, Ebell responded that "The Vatican seems to have forgotten to consider the effects that energy-rationing policies to reduce emissions will also have on poor people in poor countries."

Patrick J. Michaels, a climatologist and *director* of the Center for the *Study of Science* at the Libertarian Cato Institute, insists that Ebell is not a true climate change "denier" – or somebody who actually believes that man-made emissions have virtually nothing to do with the historic ups and down of global temperature.

Instead, he said, Ebell espouses a "luke-warm model," meaning that humans have some influence on climate, "but it's far less than the computer models indicate," Michaels said.

Michaels said in an interview on Monday that Ebell has "been around a long time" and "he knows the way that Washington works, and he's quite conservative." In many ways, he's tailor made to help return the EPA to a bygone era during the administration of Republican President George W. Bush who filled the ranks of his environmental and interior agencies with arch conservatives and former energy industry officials and lobbyists.

During the GOP presidential primary season, Trump threatened to dismantle the EPA and scrap many of its "unnecessary rules," including restrictions imposed on coal, gas and oil production. Trump subsequently backed away from his promise to shutter the EPA.

But there is little doubt he will do what he can to torpedo Obama's signature Clean Power Plan, a highly controversial policy unveiled in August 2015, designed to reduce carbon emissions from coal and gas-fired power plants by 2030 by a third. And the Republican President-elect is almost certain to withdraw this country from the first ever international comprehensive climate change agreement that the U.S. and 194 other countries ratified in Paris last December.

The Clean Power Plan is currently tied up in a federal court challenge that was brought by two dozen states, electric utilities and mining companies. On February 9, the Supreme Court stayed implementation of the Clean Power Plan pending judicial review by the lower courts. The Obama is challenging the adverse, 5 to 4, High Court ruling. But a new Trump EPA and Justice Department would have no interest in pursuing the matter.

Meanwhile, the Paris accord is hanging by a thread as world leaders and environmentalist wait to see precisely how Trump's victory will alter the U.S. government's commitment, both in meeting a long-term target for reducing its carbon emissions and providing economic assistance to other countries to help them meet their goals.

"I don't know exactly how that's going to shake out," Michaels said yesterday although he is certain the new Trump environmental policies will spell the death knell for both the Clean Power Plan and the international agreement.

"I would hope that the policies the EPA will pursue would be predicated upon the notion that probably 'the luke-warm model' is the most realistic one," he said.

Nathan Hultman, a former Obama administration environmental official and non-resident scholar at the Brookings Institution, **wrote** late last month that “the window for action to keep a lid on climate change is closing very quickly, but is not yet closed.”

For reference, he wrote, the world is now at about one degree of warming above pre-industrial levels, “and, despite some recent slowing in the rate of change, our global economy is still producing large amounts of [greenhouse gas emissions] per year.”

“The next administration should build on the policy framework our country has already laid out and encourage continued and accelerating emissions reductions,” Hultman wrote hopefully.

But that was before Trump’s surprising defeat of Democrat Hillary Clinton, a major advocate of reducing carbon emissions.