



Pruitt 'guaranteeing' debate on climate science soon

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The conservative Heritage Foundation might have just previewed the Trump administration's arguments against climate science.

U.S. EPA appears to be close to unveiling its program to question mainstream research on global warming, referred to as a "red team" exercise, and several candidates for that role cast doubt on the extent of climate change at the Heritage Foundation yesterday.

One theme they expressed is that carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels should no longer be considered a pollutant but instead an essential ingredient in maintaining a global population boom. They described potentially catastrophic impacts of human-caused warming as "alarmism." EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt could announce the red team within weeks, according to Bob Murray, a key ally of the administration and the CEO of Murray Energy Corp. The coal boss said in an interview at yesterday's event that he has been personally pushing Pruitt to challenge the endangerment finding, the scientific underpinning for past and future regulations on greenhouse gas emissions.

Murray, who met with Pruitt last week, said the administrator told him the red-team debate is imminent. Pruitt also said the exercise is the first step toward a possible challenge to the endangerment finding, Murray told E&E News.

"They're laying groundwork for it, they want to do this red, blue study, debate on science before we get there," Murray said of the endangerment finding. "I said, 'You need to get it done; if you don't get it repealed, you're going to have this climate agenda forever. It needs to be repealed.'" Murray added of Pruitt: "He's not guaranteeing me. He's guaranteeing to do the red-blue climate debate and then go from there."

The Trump administration has been aggressive in its efforts to rescind policies restricting greenhouse gases. It's working to reverse the Clean Power Plan, which sought to cut power-sector emissions 32 percent by 2030, and President Trump has announced a withdrawal from the global Paris climate accord.

But the administration has stopped short of promising to challenge the endangerment finding. That stands to be a major fight in the courts, and many administration officials anticipate defeat.

Yet if President Trump skips that fight, he would anger staunch conservatives who see the endangerment finding as the cornerstone of future climate regulation.

"We're going to have a mess until that endangerment finding is overturned," Murray said. The red-team, blue-team exercise is coming early next year, Pruitt said recently. It will pit a team of skeptical researchers against the findings of mainstream scientists. Critics have said the exercise could cherry-pick data in an effort to elevate doubt and give unequal weight to skeptics. An EPA spokesman said there are "no updates" when asked about the timing of the exercise. One panel at the Heritage Foundation event yesterday could offer a prelude to the scientific arguments that would be pursued by the red team. Several skeptical scientists picked apart the general consensus of their peers, who say humans are warming the Earth at an unprecedented pace. The panelists claimed that the attention given to rising global temperatures is overwrought. Craig Idso, who founded the Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change, said the world food supply will fall short of demand by 2050 unless more CO₂ is pumped into the atmosphere.

Roy Spencer, a climate scientist at the University of Alabama, Huntsville, said researchers who could be selected for the red team have met a few times in recent weeks in different cities. He said more government research needs to be conducted on the natural causes of climate change. That could be done if congressional budget appropriators divert a portion of the research funding for human-caused climate change toward research on natural causes.

"There are chaotic variations internal to the climate system, and that is something that has been totally swept under the rug," Spencer said. "The red team could look at all kinds of things, but if I'm part of the red team, that would probably be the top thing I would emphasize."

The researchers, all of whom are possible candidates for the red team, attacked the findings of mainstream science that humans are the primary cause of climate change. They criticized climate models, laughed at former Vice President Al Gore's advocacy and portrayed the vast majority of colleagues in their field who disagree with them as "alarmists."

The "smoking gun" that could undo the endangerment finding is to find flaws in the climate models, said Pat Michaels, director of the Center for the Study of Science at the Cato Institute. He said yesterday's panel is a prelude to the red team and an attack against the endangerment determination. He cautioned EPA against using researchers with extreme positions.

"The red team members are going to have to be very carefully selected," Michaels said. "My fear is that red team will have this tinge of 'Oh, there is no such thing as global warming; there is no such thing as carbon dioxide greenhouse gas effect.' If the red team goes there, it might as well be considered that they are working for the blue team."

Scientific consensus are often wrong, said William Happer, an emeritus physics professor at Princeton University and a contender to become Trump's science adviser. He criticized the "preening virtue signaling" of environmental groups and compared the attitude of those who craft climate policy to lawmakers who were swept up in the temperance movement before Prohibition was enacted.

"Climate models don't work; they're predicting much more warming than has been observed," Happer said.

Richard Lindzen, a retired meteorology professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, blamed "climate alarmism" on educated elites who don't want to admit their limited understanding of science. He said fossil fuels will benefit humans and that reduced Arctic sea ice will open the Northwest Passage.

After a lunch from Chick-fil-A, Murray shared the Heritage stage with Bud Brigham, who founded several successful hydraulic fracturing companies.

As Brigham sat silently, Murray largely blamed policies by the Obama administration for the decline of coal, rather than the natural gas boom associated with fracking. Murray said that despite the Trump administration's efforts, financing for coal projects is extremely hard to obtain. He said he abandoned a project last week because he failed to find funding. He blamed it on climate science, socialists and liberal policies.

"The global alarmists, the politics is still shutting us down in spite of the Trump administration's efforts. It is still getting worse; they are winning," Murray said.