

White House recommends Ryan Maue, meteorologist and critic of dire climate predictions, for NOAA chief scientist

He has pointed out flaws in the National Weather Service's computer modeling efforts.

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The White House has tapped Ryan Maue, a meteorologist who has challenged connections between extreme weather and climate change, to serve as the new chief scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Two NOAA officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about the personnel move, confirmed the appointment is in progress.

The position, pushed forward by the White House pending completion of ethics and security reviews and not requiring Senate confirmation, would put Maue in a leadership position within the agency. As chief scientist, Maue would be tasked with helping establish its oceans and atmosphere research priorities, as well as playing a role in enforcing its scientific integrity policy.

The White House and NOAA declined to comment, and the Commerce Department, which oversees the NOAA, did not respond to a request for comment.

The NOAA scientific integrity policy is meant to prevent political influence from interfering with its scientific work, as well as the communication of NOAA scientists' findings. The current acting chief scientist, Craig McLean, initiated an investigation into actions by NOAA leadership during the controversy surrounding the agency's support for President Trump's inaccurate claims regarding the path of Hurricane Dorian.

Maue serves as the developer of weathermodels.com, a site that displays computer model information using eye-catching graphics to make their simulations accessible to professionals and hobbyists. He was previously an adjunct scholar with the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank that was involved in efforts to question the scientific consensus on human-induced climate change.

Along with Patrick Michaels, a well-known climate change contrarian, Maue penned a 2018 op-ed in the Wall Street Journal challenging the climate change projections made in 1988 by noted former NASA scientist James Hansen, which other researchers, backed up by peer-reviewed studies, have found were prescient.

He has harshly criticized climate activists and Democrats for pushing for cuts in fossil fuel emissions by linking extreme weather events to global warming, but he does not dispute the fact that human-caused emissions of greenhouse gases are warming the planet in ways that are

causing significant impacts. He has also spoken out against scientists who link rapid Arctic climate change to weather extremes taking place outside the Arctic.

In recent months, he has been harshly critical of California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) and his linking of the state's deadly wildfire season to climate change. Climate studies show global warming is amplifying wildfire risks, making blazes more intense and frequent than they were a few decades ago.

For example, a study published in August shows California's frequency of fall days with extreme fire-weather conditions has already more than doubled since the 1980s.

Maue is also known for tracking and evaluating the accuracy of weather forecasting models and has a lengthy social media history of criticizing NOAA's National Weather Service for falling behind Europe, the United Kingdom and Canada on the accuracy of its computer modeling. But he has also praised the agency's recent efforts to close the gap.

Floating ice is seen during the expedition of the Greenpeace vessel Arctic Sunrise in the Arctic Ocean last week. (Natalie Thomas/Reuters)

Maue's forthcoming appointment comes amid increased White House attention to what is typically a low-key government agency. This month, the White House named controversial climate contrarian David Legates as deputy assistant secretary of Commerce for environmental observation and prediction. Legates, a professor at the University of Delaware, is affiliated with the Heartland Institute, a free-market think tank funded in part by the fossil fuel industry that supports research arguing that human-caused climate change is not a serious threat.

Legates was a lead author of a Heartland-funded, non-peer-reviewed rebuttal to the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) called, "The IPCC Reconsidered," which Heartland published most recently in 2018. That report extolled the virtues of fossil fuels, stating, "The analysis conducted here for the first time finds nearly all the impacts of fossil fuel use on human well-being are net positive (benefits minus costs), near zero (no net benefit or cost), or are simply unknown."

The IPCC has warned of severe consequences for humanity if greenhouse gases are not reduced significantly in the next one to two decades.

In addition to the appointments of Legates and Maue in recent weeks, the administration appointed a senior official to the agency's fisheries management side.

The NOAA, which oversees weather forecasting, climate research and fisheries, has continued its climate research and communications activities unfettered by political influence. For that, the NOAA stands in stark contrast to the Environmental Protection Agency and science agencies at the Interior Department, where the Trump administration has dismissed and sidelined climate scientists or altered their work before publication.

Some inside and outside the agency are now wondering if, despite it being so late in Trump's first term, the NOAA's relative freedom to communicate on climate change is about to be curtailed.

"Based on his record of engagement with climate science community and the public, I'm skeptical that Maue would be acting in good faith as a leader at NOAA," Gretchen Goldman of

the Union of Concerned Scientists, a research and advocacy group, said in an email. “It is alarming to see NOAA appoint yet another person who doesn’t align with mainstream climate science.”

Maue holds a doctorate in meteorology from Florida State University and has earned a large Twitter following by sharing his forecast graphics on social media along with expert commentary. He has also used his Twitter to share opinions on climate change, politics and current events.

Maue has frequently criticized politicians and media personalities for statements they have made about climate change, mostly on the left.

In July 2019, Maue tweeted that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) “does not miss an opportunity to turn a weather event she experiences into a political statement and blame Republicans.”

But Maue has earned the respect of some colleagues for his expertise in atmospheric sciences and for speaking his mind.

“I have respected his independent voice,” said Cliff Mass, professor of atmospheric sciences at University of Washington. “He has a good technical background, and I do appreciate he’s been willing to be very frank and honest on everything from synoptic meteorology to climate change. I think he is a very solid person to be appointed to NOAA.”

Mass, who has himself received criticism for speaking out against what he perceives as climate alarmism, conceded that Maue’s outspokenness “may discomfort some people.”

Matthew Cappucci contributed to this report.