

OPINION

WILL PRUITT BRING ON EARTHQUAKES AS HE DID IN OKLAHOMA?

BY **JEFF MCDERMOTT** ON 1/17/17 AT 7:00 AM

OPINION SCOTT PRUITT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

People are policy. This is never truer than when the president-elect has no public service experience, nor a consistent ideological foundation.

Republicans must refuse to confirm Scott Pruitt as director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) because he is an instrument of the fossil fuel industry. Pruitt has repeatedly put his ties with this industry above human health and safety during his time in office.

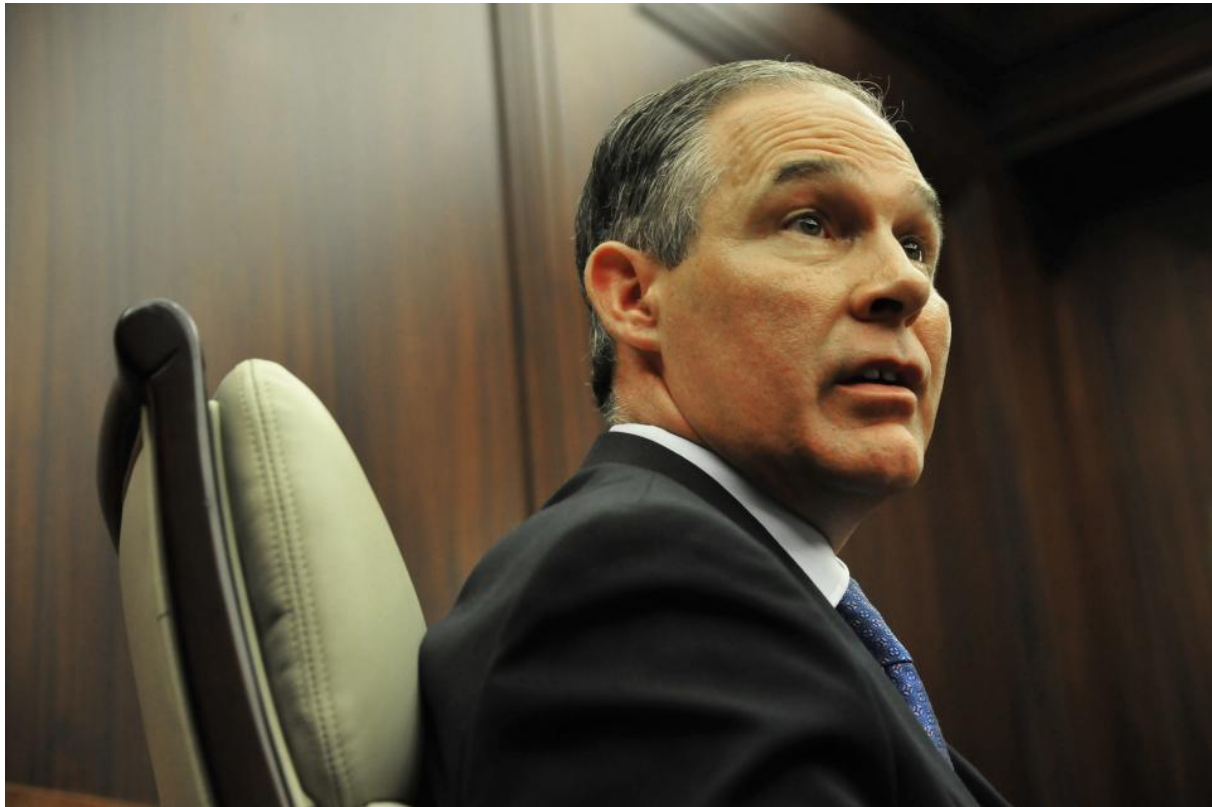
As Oklahoma State Attorney General, Pruitt copied letters drafted by fossil fuel lobbyists and sent them to government officials on Oklahoma State Government letterhead.

Pruitt more openly aligned his interests with the fossil fuel industry when he jointly filed lawsuits with industry leaders challenging EPA regulations, while also receiving sizable campaign donations from these same parties. Indeed, 46 percent of donations made to one of Scott Pruitt's PACs were traced back to the energy industry.

In Pruitt's 2014 campaign for Oklahoma Attorney General, Harold Hamm, CEO of oil and gas giant Continental Resources, was his campaign co-chair. Fossil fuel

companies have provided over \$300,000 of campaign contributions to Scott Pruitt during his numerous campaigns.

Or take his home state of Oklahoma, which has been plagued by earthquakes related to the disposal of water from fracking.



Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt and now Donald Trump's EPA pick at his office in Oklahoma City, July 29, 2014. Jeff McDermott writes that Pruitt is in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry. During Pruitt's tenure as Attorney General, Oklahoma became the most seismically active state in the Lower 48, recording three times as many earthquakes as California in 2014. Before 2009, there were, on average, two earthquakes a year in Oklahoma that were magnitude 3 or greater. In 2015, there were 890.

During Pruitt's tenure as attorney general, Oklahoma became the most seismically active state in the Lower 48, recording three times as many earthquakes as California in 2014. Before 2009, there were, on average, two earthquakes a year in Oklahoma that were magnitude 3 or greater. In 2015, there were 890.

Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, originally skeptical of the connection, created an advisory council in 2014 to study the situation, and concluded, “we all know now that there is a direct correlation between the increase of earthquakes that we’ve seen in Oklahoma with disposal wells....”

One of Pruitt’s roles as attorney general was to enforce state laws governing safety. Through his inaction, he failed miserably. Benign neglect is not a responsible government policy when homes and industries are damaged by earthquakes tied to frack water disposal practices.

Regulatory capture happens when a regulatory agency that is supposed to act in the public interest instead becomes dominated by the industries it is charged with regulating. The EPA, created to protect human health and the environment (including air, water and land), is at serious risk of regulatory capture if Pruitt is confirmed to lead it.

Economic development and environmental responsibility are not mutually exclusive. Republican leaders Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush thoughtfully recognized that America needs a balanced approach. None of these presidents saw environmental protection as a zero-sum tradeoff with jobs or prosperity.

Nixon created the EPA and signed both the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. Reagan signed the Montreal Protocol to eliminate harmful chlorofluorocarbons, and created the foundation for the “cap and trade” system, which Bush ultimately implemented to control acid rain.

Free markets are not defined as markets with a complete absence of regulatory oversight. Air and water cut across state boundaries. The federal government—through legislation enacted by Presidents Nixon, Reagan and Bush—has had an established role for over 45 years in overseeing America’s environment.

Pruitt’s framing of all environmental issues as a states’ rights matter is disingenuous. He did not protect the rights of Oklahoma’s citizens, and his inaction regarding the state’s earthquake damages reflected his allegiance to fossil fuel companies.

Under the Obama administration, U.S. oil production has surged 76 percent. Similarly, natural gas production has increased 33 percent over the same time period. America has had the biggest increase in oil production ever, making the U.S. the world's No. 1 petroleum producer.

It would be a travesty to confirm Scott Pruitt solely to benefit a fossil fuel industry that is already booming. Republicans must deny the confirmation of such a fossil fuel-funded nominee.

Jeff McDermott is a registered Republican and frequent contributor to Republican candidates. He is the managing partner at Greentech Capital Advisors and has over 30 years of transaction experience working on mergers and acquisitions and financings. Prior to founding GCA, Jeff was the joint global head of investment banking at UBS.