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[AMY DAVIDSON](#)

SCOTT PRUITT REJECTS CLIMATE- CHANGE REALITY

By [Amy Davidson](#)

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To the new To E.P.A. chief, concern for climate change, or just a basic belief in science, is yet another crazed form of political correctness. PHOTOGRAPH BY KENA BETANCUR / AFP / Getty

Scott Pruitt, President Donald Trump’s choice to run the Environmental Protection Agency, was explaining to CNBC’s Joe Kernan that the Paris climate accord was “a bad deal,” with provisions that were “not an America First type of

approach,” when Kernen asked him if they could cut to the “nitty-gritty.” Did Pruitt believe that “it’s been proven that CO₂ is the primary control knob for climate?” “No,” Pruitt [replied](#). “No, I think that measuring with precision human activity on the climate is something very challenging to do, and there’s tremendous disagreement about the degree of impact.” And then, lest anyone think that he was merely rejecting Kernen’s Spaceship Earth image of a planetary control board with big knobs on it—rather than the observation, validated by decades of data, of the profound effect of the accumulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere—Pruitt added, “So, no, I would *not* agree that it’s a primary contributor to the global warming that we see.”

As Pruitt went on about the need to “continue the debate,” Kernen could hardly contain his delight. “I agree!” he said. “When I hear ‘the science is settled,’ it’s like, I never heard that science actually got to a point where it was—that’s the whole point of science, is that you keep asking questions.” (In an interview with the *Times* after the election, Trump placed Kernen alongside the “smart people” who had different views on climate change from those of the likes of Tom Friedman.) Then, having established that it’s anti-scientific to believe that scientists could come up with an idea that is any sort of a basis for action—a position that raises doubts about decisions to send humans to the moon or to tell them to stop smoking—Kernen moved on to another point where the rejection of the science of climate change meets a dozen other threads of Trumpism: the cultivation of resentment. “I don’t want to be called a denier,” Kernen said. “So, you know, *it scares me*. It’s a terrible thing to be called, and anyway, Administrator Pruitt, I know you don’t want to be called it either.”

It was scary, in other words, and terrible to be told, by a presumably terrible mob, that you might doom the planet—terribly unfair, and worse than actually dooming it. Never mind that the deniers have the President, the bulk of the Republican Party, and a significant segment of private industry behind them: here was denialism as a form of victimhood. Conversely, concern for climate change, or just a basic belief in science, was yet another crazed form of political correctness. There is a parallel here with the umbrage that many conservatives take when anyone short of a Klansman putting on a hood is called a racist. A recent example came in the confirmation hearings for [Jeff Sessions](#), which featured various Southern men sympathizing with one another about the things they didn’t want to be called. Another was in the oral arguments before the Supreme Court that resulted in the gutting of the Voting Rights Act, in which the late Justice Antonin Scalia [said](#) that the Court had to act, because Congress was too terrorized by charges of racism. And now, apparently, it takes a brave man, besieged by America Not First-ers, to tell the world that the relation between carbon dioxide and

climate change is nothing more than a puzzle, like the question of whether there might be little green men on a distant planet.

Pruitt, for his part, smiled cheerfully, like a man looking forward to tossing aside not only climate models and ice cores but every manner of silliness that scientists might come up with. Earlier in the interview, he had complained to Kernen that the E.P.A.—now his E.P.A.—had engaged in “literally a power grab,” designed to allow it to regulate “puddles.” In other words, the petty absurdity of the environmentalists’ priorities was matched only by their despotic overreach. Pruitt and Kernen also engaged in an exchange about how the focus on carbon dioxide was a wasteful distraction. In addition to casting doubt on the future of the Paris accord, Pruitt suggested that the agency would move quickly to weaken the regulation of emissions from cars and power plants, and boasted that the E.P.A. had already withdrawn some of its requests to private industry for information about methane. He described these abandonments as “taking steps to instill rule of law.” In that, too, he spoke to the Trumpist picture of the Obama Administration as somehow lawless. As the Attorney General of Oklahoma, Pruitt repeatedly sued the E.P.A. in consultation, as public records document, with oil-and-gas lobbyists. ([Elizabeth Kolbert](#) has written about these connections.) On CNBC, he said he would be “making sure that we’re listening to those in industry, how it’s going to impact them as rules are passed.” The *Times* reported earlier this week that Pruitt had brought a number of people whom the paper called “climate skeptics” into the agency, including a few from the staff of Senator James Inhofe, also of Oklahoma, whom one can certainly, without pausing for politeness, call a climate-change denier. Inhofe, after all, said during the Paris climate talks that the negotiators just seemed, to him, to be putting together a “[coverup deal](#).”

Pruitt does not provide much cover for the Trump Administration, though there have been times, as in his confirmation hearings, when he put more of an effort into evasiveness. But then, whatever Ivanka Trump would like the world to think, there are no real signs that Trump even wants to pretend to care about climate change. (During the campaign, he mocked Obama and others for doing so.) In his address to Congress, Trump’s only reference to climate change came obliquely, in the form of a pledge not to do anything that would put a check on fossil-fuel industries. He has said that he likes clean water and clean air—just not the regulations that make those things possible. And, as the *Washington Post* reported, his Administration has plans to sharply cut the E.P.A.’s funding. Mustafa Ali, the E.P.A. official leading its work on environmental justice, has quit, because of plans to eliminate his office and its particular mission as part of the cuts. Ali told the *Post*, “I never saw in the past a concerted effort to roll back the positive steps that many, many people have worked on through all the previous Administrations.” He added, “I can’t be a part of

anything that would hurt those communities.” Communities and continents are going to be hurt as a result of the Trump Administration taking the path Pruitt has helped it chart out. And that is a terribly unfair thing.



Amy Davidson is a New Yorker staff writer. She is a regular Comment contributor for the magazine and writes a Web [column](#), in which she covers war, sports, and everything in between.

