

Former Texas governor who called for abolition of Energy Department to be Trump's energy secretary

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In nominating former Texas Governor Rick Perry as secretary of energy, President-elect Donald Trump is continuing the pattern of selecting enemies of consumer protection and regulation of business to run the federal agencies charged with these responsibilities.

Perry is on record as a supporter of the complete elimination of the Department of Energy. It was the third of three federal departments he called for abolishing during a Republican presidential debate in 2011, the one whose name he forgot, leading to the widely ridiculed “Oops” moment that helped torpedo his campaign for the 2012 nomination.

The Department of Energy has two major functions: regulatory oversight of energy industries, including fossil fuel, wind, solar and nuclear; and production, storage and replenishment of the US nuclear weapons stockpile. The latter function, including massive cleanup costs involved in disposing of nuclear waste, accounts for two-thirds of the department's budget.

When Perry and other right-wing Republicans and think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation call for the abolition of the Department of Energy, they have in mind its regulatory functions and programs for promoting non-fossil-fuel energy sources such as wind and solar, not its nuclear weapons operations, which would be transferred to the Pentagon.

The direction that Trump intends for the Department of Energy was indicated by a questionnaire sent by Trump's transition team to the agency, which sought, among other things, “a list of all Department of Energy employees or contractors who have attended” certain meetings related to climate change. Energy Department officials declined to provide such a list, but the request led to widespread complaints from workers in the

agency that the incoming administration was preparing a witch-hunt against those who upheld the scientific case for the dangers of global warming.

Perry's signing on with the government of Donald Trump is a remarkable act of political cynicism on both sides. During the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination, Perry made some of the most scathing comments as Trump began to emerge as the frontrunner. Perry described Trump as a “cancer on conservatism” whose campaign was “a toxic mix of demagoguery, mean-spiritedness and nonsense that will lead the Republican Party to perdition if pursued.”

Now this cancerous demagogue has offered Perry a position of considerable power, commanding a department with 100,000 employees and contractors and a \$30 billion budget, with influence over policies critical to the business interests Perry has long represented politically, and Perry has leapt at the chance.

As the governor for 14 years of the state with the highest oil and gas production, Perry has the closest ties to the industry, invariably taking its side on issues such as antipollution regulation, legally required cleanup efforts and workers' safety.

After the BP oil spill polluted much of the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, the worst environmental disaster in US history, the Texas governor alibied for the giant corporation even as tar balls were washing up on Texas beaches. He called the explosion on the Deep Horizon oil platform an “act of God.”

BP was also responsible for one of the worst industrial disasters on land, which occurred during Perry's governorship. This was the May 2005 Texas City refinery explosion, which killed 15 workers and

injured 170 others.

After leaving office, Perry immediately signed on as a shill for the oil and gas industry. He is currently on the board of directors of Energy Transfer Partners, the company that is building the Dakota Access Pipeline, the target of mass protests by Native Americans and environmentalists near the Standing Rock Reservation.

Perry is an adamant opponent of climate science, going even beyond Trump. While the president-elect has alternately denounced climate change as a “hoax” perpetrated by China and declared that he has an “open mind” on the subject, the former Texas governor has claimed that climate change is a scam by “a substantial number of scientists who have manipulated data so that they will have dollars rolling into their projects.”

As energy secretary, Perry will be in charge of major nuclear weapons facilities, including Hanford, Washington; Los Alamos, New Mexico; and Savannah, Georgia. At all of these facilities there are pressing issues of worker safety and the safety of the populations living near the sites.

One of the most important issues for the next energy secretary will be the ongoing preparations for a permanent storage site for nuclear waste generated by the military and the civilian nuclear power industry. The facility is to be built at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. Its completion was long blocked by Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.



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