

EPA head Scott Pruitt subject of growing demands for removal over open corruption

Matthew Taylor
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Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has faced escalating calls for his ouster in recent weeks as new details emerge regarding his abuse of his position for personal gain. Pruitt, who is said to still enjoy the support of President Trump, has worked consistently to block any new regulations on the energy and manufacturing industries and to roll back any previous regulations that may impose on their ability to profit off the destruction of the environment.

The latest allegations against Pruitt involve his rental of a Washington, D.C. condo from health care lobbyist Vicki Hart, wife of J. Steven Hart, whose law firm, Williams and Jensen, lobbies on behalf of the energy industry.

Pruitt paid \$50 a night for the rental, far below market rates, and paid only for the nights that he stayed at the condo, an unusual and, from the landlord's perspective, unprofitable arrangement. In March of 2017, the EPA approved the expansion of a pipeline project from Enbridge Inc., a Canadian energy company and client of Williams and Jensen. The approval was granted although Enbridge had previously been fined \$61 million in connection to a pipeline rupture in Michigan in 2010.

This follows revelations earlier this year that since his confirmation Pruitt had spent nearly \$100,000 in government funds on travel expenses, including first-class airfare and stays at various luxury hotels. Pruitt has also insisted on bringing an extended entourage of EPA officials and a large security detail along with him on his many trips, further swelling the costs. Pruitt's travel expenses are now being investigated by the EPA's inspector general.

On Thursday the *New York Times* revealed that Pruitt had either transferred, demoted or fired multiple EPA employees who had criticized his extravagant spending.

According to the *Times*, this included attempting to purchase a \$100,000 a month membership in a charter aircraft business, a proposed expenditure of \$70,000 to replace two desks in Pruitt's office—one of the desks was to be constructed from bulletproof material—and the construction of a \$43,000 "special security booth" within his office with sound dampening and radio frequency blocking technology so that Pruitt could have conversations with his aides without other EPA officials overhearing.

The *Times* article also takes notes of Pruitt's security-related requests. This included expanding his security detail to 20, far larger than any of his predecessors, the use of a bulletproof SUV with "run flat" tires to travel in, and permission for his security caravan to use sirens and red lights to move quickly through traffic, a perk which Pruitt reportedly used to ensure he was on time for restaurant reservations.

Pruitt, who does not accept the global scientific consensus that carbon emissions caused by human activity are the primary cause of global warming, was selected by Trump to lead the EPA in order to carry out a far-ranging deregulation of environmental protections. A former attorney general and state senator from Oklahoma, Pruitt has personified the close ties between big business and the political system throughout his career.

First elected to the Oklahoma state senate in 1998, where he served as the Republican whip from 2001 to 2003, Pruitt established himself as an enemy of the working class early on, introducing legislation that would require drug testing for those injured on the job in order to collect workers compensation benefits.

During his time as a state senator Pruitt served as chairman for a task force sponsored by the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, an

organization composed of Republican legislators and businessmen that produces “model” legislation attacking worker protections and championing the interests of big business and the far right across a range of issues, including immigration, voter ID laws, criminal sentencing laws and environmental protections.

Pruitt became Oklahoma’s attorney general in 2010, a post he was re-elected to in 2014. One of Pruitt’s first acts as Attorney General was to dissolve the environmental protection unit within his office. Throughout the remainder of his tenure, Pruitt consistently sought to subvert the constitution in the interests of the energy lobbyists, bankers, and religious conservatives who form his base of support.

In 2012, Pruitt successfully withdrew his state from the \$26 billion National Mortgage Settlement, an agreement reached between the government and the five largest mortgage providers (Ally/GMAC, Bank of America, Citi, JPMorgan Chase, and Wells Fargo) in the aftermath of the 2009 financial crisis, which saw tens of thousands of Americans lose their homes to illegal foreclosures by the banks stemming from fraudulent mortgages issued in previous years.

In 2013, he sought to restrict abortion rights in his state by supporting legislation that would restrict the use of certain medications. That same year Pruitt’s office claimed that the U.S Supreme Court’s decision to legalize same-sex marriage by striking down of the Defense of Marriage Act did not invalidate Oklahoma state laws which discriminated against homosexuals.

Pruitt sought to block a 2014 order from the Oklahoma State Supreme Court pausing executions in the state until a new lethal injection protocol could be implemented. He was later forced to relent after the “botched” execution of Clayton Lockett.

Throughout his political career, Pruitt has made no secret of his sponsorship by the energy industry. As attorney general, he filed some 13 lawsuits against the EPA. He has collected over \$300,000 in donations from oil and gas companies over the years. His 2014 re-election campaign was chaired by Harold Hamm, CEO of Continental Resources, an Oklahoma-based energy company.

Pruitt was further exposed as a puppet for the energy industry when it was revealed by the *New York Times* that a letter signed by him and sent to the EPA in 2014

criticizing regulations of new natural gas wells in his state was authored by attorneys for Devon Energy, another Oklahoma energy company, and was hand delivered to Pruitt by the company’s chief lobbyist for his signature.

Upon taking office at the EPA, Pruitt wasted little time in carrying out the agenda set out for him by his corporate backers. In addition to repealing the Clean Power Act and Clean Water Act, he has rescinded dozens of regulations covering fossil fuel extraction and pollution. Most recently, his agency rolled back Obama-era regulations which aimed to mandate new levels of fuel efficiency for auto manufacturers.

Pruitt successfully blocked the banning of the pesticide chlorpyrifos in March 2017, in spite of the fact that scientists at his own agency had determined that any level of exposure to the chemical was toxic. It was later revealed that Pruitt had met with officials from Dow Chemical, the manufacturer of chlorpyrifos, several weeks before issuing his decision refusing to implement a ban. That same month Pruitt attempted to delay implementation of a new rule regarding methane leaks after meeting with 45 representatives of the American Petroleum Institute at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C.



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