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EPA's Pruitt Denies He's an Ally of Polluters, Vows to Get Tough

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Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, vowed that he will get tough on corporate polluters, dismissing critics who cast him as too cozy with industry.

"They don't know me," Pruitt said, during an interview with Bloomberg News in his Washington office. "I've led a grand jury. We are going to do enforcement, to go after bad actors and go after polluters."

Pruitt, the former Oklahoma attorney general, is leading the efforts to roll back Obama-era environmental regulations, including the first limits on carbon dioxide emissions from power plants and an overhaul of clean-water rules. Despite moving to rescind those measures, those that remain in place will be fully enforced, he said.

"I know what it means to prosecute people," he said. "And we've got some of those folks across the country -- those people that are intentionally taking steps to pollute our water, to pollute our air."

While coal miners, manufacturers and oil companies have praised Pruitt's efforts to halt or rescind regulations, environmental advocates say he's the leading example of a Trump administration appointee who has an agenda that conflicts with the very nature of the agency he leads.

Under former President Barack Obama, the EPA played a pivotal role in the government's fight against climate change, proposing sweeping rules to limit on methane leaks from oil wells and carbon-dioxide emissions from coal plants. Pruitt, who sued the EPA more than a dozen time to challenge those and other regulations, by contrast, is pursuing what he calls a "back to basics" agenda that he says will prioritize action on traditional pollutants.

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Pruitt highlighted the EPA's decision earlier this month to approve a plan for removing toxins from the San Jacinto Waste Pits, a Superfund site near Houston that began leaking cancer-causing dioxin after flooding from Hurricane Harvey.

That included ordering two companies -- International Paper Co. and a subsidiary of Waste Management Inc. -- to pay an estimated \$115 million toward excavating more than 212,000 cubic

yards of contaminated waste from the site. Both companies have objected to the cleanup plan.

"And they are already barking down there," Pruitt said, referencing those companies' complaints. Pruitt said he was told some people would be "surprised" he would seek to hold Fortune 500 companies accountable.

Another example: In June, the Trump administration filed a lawsuit alleging that a Colorado-based oil company repeatedly violated clean air rules by allowing volatile organic compounds to escape from storage-tank batteries. According to the complaint filed in that civil case, the EPA alleged that PDC Energy Inc. failed to adequately design, operate and maintain control systems on those tanks., resulting in those leaks. That case is ongoing.

"I am here because I really feel called to it," Pruitt said. "My desire each day is to bless the president and the decisions he's making."

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