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The Minneapolis Star-Tribune

EPA's Pruitt Signals Welcome Support for Great Lakes Restoration Project

Editorial

July 21, 2017

<http://www.startribune.com/epa-s-pruitt-signals-welcome-support-for-great-lakes-restoration-project/435922323/>

Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Scott Pruitt's visit to Minnesota last week yielded an unexpected boon for those who care about clean water. In an interview with a Star Tribune reporter, Pruitt affirmed his support for federal funding of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which provides landmark protections for Lakes Huron, Erie, Michigan, Ontario and, most treasured by Minnesotans, Superior.

The work that went into creating the multistate compact was years in the making, uniting governors and legislators of both parties in an unprecedented and legally binding pledge to preserve the interconnected freshwaters that touch the borders of eight states and Canada.

Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed the compact for Minnesota in 2007, and DFL Gov. Mark Dayton continued the work. Republican President George W. Bush made it federal law, with bipartisan support in Congress, and Democratic President Barack Obama committed the necessary federal funding.

It's fitting that the EPA recognize and support the work and goals of those state and U.S. leaders. Pruitt, who made a mission out of suing the EPA in his home state of Oklahoma, was expected to come in as something of an anti-EPA warrior. And some of his actions have given cause for concern, including planned agency layoffs, rejection of climate change and rollbacks on some regulations.

But there also are glimmers of recognition that states face daunting environmental problems that cannot be wished away. The Great Lakes compact is significant in large measure because states from here to Pennsylvania set aside partisan differences, found common ground and committed to long-term, mutual cooperation.

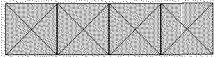
A U.S. House appropriations committee also has recognized the compact's worth. It voted for a budget that, while unfortunately trimming overall EPA funding, would preserve the \$300 million for the Great Lakes. Pruitt's support for the compact is especially notable because the Trump administration's budget would have essentially zeroed out funding for the project.

Pruitt, who met with Dayton while he was here, is touring other states. Let's hope he'll gain an even greater appreciation for the environmental challenges ahead. Interestingly, he has said that upon arriving in Washington he found a "lack of urgency" at the agency on fighting major pollution. He said

40 percent of Americans live in areas that fail to meet air quality standards, a percentage he calls "unacceptable."

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