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Sent: 12/15/2017 2:02:11 PM
To: Wehrum, Bill [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=33d96ae800cf43a3911d94a7130b6c41-Wehrum, Wil]

You got time to chat this weekend? Ex. 6

Climate science debate 'on hold' after White House meeting

Robin Bravender, E&E News reporter



@JohnHMerrill/Twitter (Dearborn); Hunton & Williams (Wehrum)

Published:
Friday,
December 15,
2017
Officials met this week to discuss disagreements about debating climate science. (From left) Mike Catanzaro, Rick Dearborn and Bill Wehrum. Tom Williams (Catanzaro);

The effort by U.S. EPA to publicly debate mainstream climate science is on ice.

The idea of a "red team, blue team" debate to critique climate science — championed by EPA boss Scott Pruitt — has created divisions within the Trump administration, spurring high-level staff discussions at the White House about how to proceed. Earlier this week, EPA air chief Bill Wehrum attended a White House meeting with Trump energy aide Mike Catanzaro, deputy chief of staff Rick Dearborn and others to discuss the future of the debate, according to an administration official.

After the talk, the red team "has been put on hold," according to someone familiar with the meeting.

President Trump has privately told Pruitt he supports a public debate to challenge mainstream climate science, administration officials told E&E News (*Climatewire*, Dec. 11). But the administration isn't unified behind the idea, and an official said prior to this week's meeting that "Pruitt has not been given authorization to go ahead with red team, blue team; there are still many issues to be ironed out."

That came after Pruitt told House lawmakers last week that work on the red team is "ongoing" but that details could be unveiled as early as next month. "We may be able to get there as early as January next year," he said.

It appears there are still some sticking points within the administration, and it's unclear when a formal initiative might be announced and what shape it might take. Conservatives and scientists outside the administration who support the general idea of a climate science red team are also divided over exactly what form it should take and where it should be housed ([see related story](#)).

"There's been speculation that Pruitt and the White House have differences of opinion over how it should be launched and what part of the government should be in charge of it," said a source close to the administration.

Pruitt frequently brings up the idea in interviews and has suggested the debate could air on television. But he typically steers clear of specifics.

"So the red team, blue team approach ... is something that puts experts in a room and lets them debate an issue," Pruitt said on "Fox & Friends" in September. "The American people deserve that type of objective, transparent discussion."

He added: "We know the climate is always changing. We know humans contribute to it in some way. To what degree, to measure that with precision is very difficult. But what we don't know: Are we in a situation where it's an existential threat?"

Asked yesterday about the status of a red team effort, EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman said, "We will share updates if/when they become available."

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