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## THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

# EPA Chief: Under Trump, Agency Is Like Never Before

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<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/EPA-chief-Under-Trump-agency-is-like-never-12292376.php>

Environmental Protection Agency Chief Scott Pruitt gave a succinct message to oil and gas industry leaders Thursday night: The Trump administration's agency will be nothing like the last.

President Donald Trump and his cabinet members are "focused on results and that's been the primary focus of my first months at the EPA," Pruitt said. "We're establishing metrics and benchmarks and performance standards in key areas of what we do."

Pruitt spoke Thursday night during the Texas Oil and Gas Association's annual Lone Star Energy Forum in The Woodlands, answering questions for about 30 minutes from the association's president, Todd Staples.

As an example of quick action, he pointed to the San Jacinto Waste Pits. After years of waiting for the area to be cleaned up, Pruitt said, he came in mid-September and promised an answer by Oct. 14. On Oct. 11, the EPA approved a plan to permanently remove tons of toxics from the waste pits.

### 'Getting back to basics'

Prior to his discussion Thursday night, Pruitt said he met with community members and environmental advocates about the San Jacinto Waste Pits. He said they were thanking him for acting quickly.

"We're getting back to basics, focused on our core mission, focused on results," he said.

Earlier in the day, about a dozen environmental advocates gathered at the old Brady's Landing restaurant to protest Pruitt's appearance at the association's meeting. Pruitt, they said, should take a "toxic tour" of their neighborhoods, rather than speak to oil and gas leaders.

During Thursday's talk, Pruitt talked about working with Trump - whom he called a courageous man of action - as well as his plans to act faster on Superfund site and permitting decisions.

Staples questioned Pruitt about the clean power plan, which Pruitt decided to withdraw earlier this month. Pruitt said he believed the last administration used it to start a war on coal or fossil fuels.

"I don't believe it's the role of the EPA to pick winners and losers," he said. "I don't think it's the role of the EPA to say here's what you should choose ... they should use all forms of electricity ... based upon what? Stability and costs."

Pruitt said the agency is evaluating its options to replace the plan under current law, but cannot do anything Congress has not already authorized it to do.

"Our job is to follow the law, we can't make it up," he said. "That was novel to the last administration, it's fundamental to this administration."

This has caused regulatory and financial uncertainty both in the energy and health care sectors, he said.

"The greatest impact on the low percentage of growth is regulatory uncertainty because you have regulators acting in ways that's untethered to statute," he said.

### **Partnerships sought**

He also noted his agency's commitment to a transparent rule-making process that involves the public and not the courts. Pruitt also spoke about the importance of partnership between all environmental stakeholders, including the energy industry.

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He noted energy industry leaders care about the water they drink and the air they breathe.

"Are there bad actors out there? Absolutely," he said. "We're going to prosecute bad actors, but we shouldn't start by saying (certain people) don't care about these issues. You do."

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