

Pruitt made conciliatory noises when he arrived at EPA. I suspect the honeymoon is over. On Thursday, he was asked on CNBC whether CO₂ is the main cause of climate change. His answer? ““I think that measuring with precision human activity on the climate is something very challenging to do and there’s tremendous disagreement about the degree of impact, so no, I would not agree that it’s a primary contributor to the global warming that we see.”

EPA’s website says its mission is to ensure that “national efforts to reduce environmental risk are based on the best available scientific information.” Thousands of scientists all around the world have conducted an immense amount of research investigating the role of CO₂, all of which has been thoroughly reviewed by the agency.

And there’s little dispute among serious scientists about the primary role of CO₂. Basically, every important scientific organization in the world has taken that view, as I documented in a December blog post:

- The American Physical Society, on behalf of the nation’s physicists, [says](#): “If no mitigating actions are taken, significant disruptions in the Earth’s physical and ecological systems, social systems, security and human health are likely to occur. We must reduce emissions of greenhouse gases beginning now.”
- The American Chemistry Society [says](#): “comprehensive scientific assessments of our current and potential future climates clearly indicate that climate change is real, largely attributable to emissions from human activities, and potentially a very serious problem.”
- The National Academy of Science [endorses](#) the need for action on climate change.
- So does the UK’s Royal Society, as do the scientific organizations of Russia, China, Japan, Brazil, Italy, Germany, India, and Canada.

Pruitt didn’t stop with blowing off climate science. He also questioned whether EPA has the ability or authority to regulate CO₂ in any event: “Nowhere in the equation has Congress spoken. The legislative branch has not addressed this issue at all. It’s a very fundamental question to say, ‘Are the tools in the toolbox available to the EPA to address this issue of CO₂, as the court had recognized in 2007, with it being a pollutant?’”

Not content with that, Pruitt also attacked the Paris Agreement: “It’s one thing to be talking about CO₂ internationally. But when you front-load your costs, as we endeavored to do in that agreement, and then China and India back-loaded their costs for 2030 and beyond, that’s not good for America. That’s not an America first type of approach.”

These comments reinforce two points I’ve made in recent blog posts. First, as

I've [discussed](#), Pruitt is likely to find himself at war with his agency. The agency is full of people who have spent years studying carbon change and who are quite sure that CO₂ causes climate change and that EPA needs to address the problem. The traditional division of authority is that the experts do the science and the political appointees make the value judgments. Pruitt wants to do both, or perhaps doesn't know the difference.

This is part of a larger pattern of disrespect for expertise in the Trump Administration. It doesn't occur to Pruitt that he should be listening to what the agency's own scientists are saying, because he considers what he has learned on Fox News about climate change is just as valid. This attitude toward expertise comes straight from the boss, who famously said that he knew more about military affairs than the generals.

Second, Pruitt's statement illustrates how much the GOP is out of touch with mainstream American society and even the oil industry. Here are some factoids from the same December blog post:

- In [2015](#), Shell and BP called for international cooperation to achieve the 2° F temperature target. BP actually had an internal cap-and-trade system for carbon.
- Rex W. Tillerson, ExxonMobil's chief executive and Trump's Secretary of State, [has](#) "repeatedly said that he would support putting a price on carbon as long as it was 'revenue neutral.'" (He has continued to push for the Paris Agreement since joining the Trump Administration).
- In an [open letter](#), hundreds of businesses urged Trump to stick with the Paris Agreement. Exxon takes that position too.
- A year ago, two-thirds of Americans agreed that climate change is caused by humans. According to [Gallup](#), that was the highest number since the start of the century.

The bottom line is that Pruitt (like Trump himself) lives in a bubble where bad science and eccentric policy views have become unquestioned truths. That's going to make governance challenging for him and a risk to the rest of us.