

Trump nominates a coal lobbyist to the number two spot at EPA

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[NATASHA GEILING](https://thinkprogress.org/trump-nominates-coal-lobbyist-epa-ef0918d640fd/) ThinkProgress OCT 5, 2017  
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The White House [announced Thursday](#) that President Donald Trump has officially nominated Andrew Wheeler, a former coal lobbyist, to be deputy administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Until recently, Wheeler was a registered lobbyist for Murray Energy; he [de-registered](#) as a lobbyist on August 11, following [months of speculation](#) that he would be tapped for the number two position within the EPA. Murray Energy is the country's largest privately owned coal company; it's CEO, Bob Murray, is an ardent Trump supporter who hosted an [invitation-only fundraiser](#) for Trump during the presidential campaign and donated [\\$300,000](#) to his inauguration.

Wheeler represented Murray as a lobbyist beginning in 2009. Before that, he worked for Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK), a man who famously brought a snowball onto the floor of the Senate in an attempt to disprove the scientific evidence behind climate change. He also worked for more than a decade as a staffer on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, serving as both staff director and chief counsel. Early in his career, Wheeler [worked at the EPA](#) as a special assistant in the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics.

As deputy administrator, Wheeler would oversee offices and programs charged with regulating the coal industry. Such work would ostensibly require Wheeler to obtain a waiver from the [Trump administration's ethics pledge](#), which bars executive branch appointees from participating "in any particular matter involving specific parties that is directly and substantially related to my former employer or former clients, including regulations and contracts" for a period of two years. The pledge also requires any lobbyist that was registered within two years before the date of their appointment to recuse themselves, for a period of two years, from participating in any matter on which the appointee lobbied.

According to lobbying disclosure forms, Wheeler participated in a number lobbying activities that would likely fall under the purview of deputy administrator, including “[general energy and environmental issues](#).”

An outspoken advocate for the coal industry, Wheeler has long questioned the mainstream consensus on climate change. In 2006, while working for the Senate Environment and Public Works committee, Wheeler suggested that the Earth might actually be going through a “cooling phase.” In March of 2010, he [commented](#) on a National Journal article about the U.N.’s International Panel on Climate Change, arguing that the body had “blurred the lines between science and advocacy to the point where they are unable to separate situational awareness from proposed remedies.”

He also suggested that the EPA’s 2009 Endangerment Finding — which relied on scientific evidence to determine that greenhouse gas emissions pose a threat to public health, and therefore could be subject to regulation under the Clean Air Act — should be reconsidered. Overturning the endangerment finding has been a major priority for conservative groups like the [Competitive Enterprise Institute](#) and [the Heartland Institute](#), as it would strip away the EPA’s legal authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmental groups criticized the nomination, arguing that Wheeler’s time as a coal lobbyist would present an inextricable conflict with his work as a regulator.

“Andrew Wheeler is a big time lobbyist who has represented Big Coal for almost a decade, including in numerous lawsuits challenging the EPA,” Melinda Pierce, legislative director for the Sierra Club, said in a statement. “He is a friend to polluters, not to American families that rely on clean air and clean water.”

Wheeler’s pro-coal, anti-climate science stance would fit nicely with his potential boss, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. Pruitt also questions the scientific consensus on climate change, and has [begun a formal initiative](#) to “evaluate” climate science through a “red team-blue team” exercise that would pit mainstream climate science ([backed by 97 percent](#) of publishing climate scientists) against more contrarian views.

Pruitt has also agreed to regulatory rollbacks at the [behest of the coal industry](#), recently announcing that the EPA would reconsider a 2015 rule meant to protect communities that live near toxic coal ash sites. Pruitt has also begun the process of [repealing](#) the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, which would have placed emission limits on power plants and was [vehemently opposed](#) by the coal industry.