

Trump Public Lands Director Won't Say Why He Denies Global Warming—And Says He Has Yet to Be “Briefed” on It

By [Jason Salzman](#)

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In a contentious exchange with journalists Friday, the acting director of the federal agency in charge of most public lands in the U.S. insisted his “personal views,” which include a denial of global warming and hostility toward immigrants, have no bearing on his job and he repeatedly refused to discuss his opinions on some topics.

But William Perry Pendley, the acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management, contradicted his no-personal-opinion stance by offering strong opinions on other topics.

“You have been clear in the past, on twitter and elsewhere, that you don’t think climate change exists,” *New York Times* reporter Lisa Friedman told Pendley during a [panel discussion at the annual Society of Environmental Journalists’ conference](#) in Ft. Collins. “I’m hoping that you can clarify for us, first, what did you mean by that? What don’t you think exists? Is it, you don’t think greenhouse gases are warming the earth? Is it something else? What scientists do you rely on for those conclusions, and if the answer required is that this is your personal opinion, maybe you could explain to us some concrete things that you’ve done to help inform or discuss this issue and ensure that personal opinions are not at play in making policy decisions.”

“Nope, not going to clarify,” replied Penley, who’d said earlier in the session that, in his role as BLM director, he’d not yet been “briefed” on climate change issues, in his new job, and did not know when he would be briefed. “Those are my personal opinions.”

“I’m a Marine. I follow orders,” Pendley responded, saying his boss, Secretary of Interior David Benhardt, has said global warming exists and humans have an impact. “He’s told me the way it’s going to be, and that’s the way it’s going to be.”

In response to another journalist’s question, Pendley refused to say whether he still thought “illegal immigration is spreading like a cancer,” as he wrote in a 2007 fundraising letter.

“My personal opinions are irrelevant,” responded Pendley, who will be visiting the border next week to inspect BLM land that his agency must clear for use in construction of Trump’s proposed border wall along the Mexican border. “I have a new job now. I’m a zealous advocate for my client. My client is the American people. And my boss is the president of the United

States and Secretary Bernhardt. So what I thought, what I wrote, what I did in the past is irrelevant. I have orders. I have laws to obey, and I intend to do that.”

But Pendley was eager to offer his personal opinion on multiple other issues that arose in the session.

When the panel’s moderator asked all the members of the panel for their thoughts on the proposals by Democratic presidential candidates to stop all new fossil fuel leasing from public lands and public waters, Pendley said, “I’ll jump in,” and he slammed the idea.

“I would be absolutely devastating not just to the American West but to the entire country,” he said. “A tremendous amount of the energy we use every day, whether it’s natural gas or oil, comes from federal lands.

“I can give no other word for it than, absolutely insane and a terrible blow to the American people, to the West. We’ll see how that stands up,” he added. “...I think the overwhelming majority of American people would vote against it.”

Pendley’s desire to pick and choose which of his views to discuss leaves much on the table—because he was widely known as a hardened conservative activist, [with extreme views](#), prior to his appointment to his post by Bernhardt in July.

He once [accused](#) federal land managers and advocates of “tyranny” for “waging war on the West.”

Pendley served under much-criticized Secretary of Interior James Watt from 1981-1984 and was accused at the time of selling coal resources at the Powder River Basin to industry entities at a \$100 million loss to taxpayers.

As the long-time Director of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, a conservative advocacy group based in Colorado, Pendley supported Cliven Bundy, the renegade anti-government activist who occupied public lands in a 2014 standoff with the Bureau of Land Management.

On Thursday during an interview on talk radio in Denver, Pendley inched toward supporting folks like Bundy.

The radio host referenced “families fighting with the government” and a “shoot out,” and then asked Pendley about people who feel like the government isn’t on their side.

Without responding directly to the “shoot out” comment by the Libertarian radio host Ross Kaminsky, Pendley framed himself as a defender of the people against government.

“Over the last 30 years, I’ve had the opportunity to work with loggers, miners, ranchers, recreationists, canoeists, boaters,” Pendley told KHOW radio’s Ross Kaminsky. “You name it, I’ve worked with them, represented them, gone to the Supreme Court on their behalf. And so, I get their situation vis a vis the federal government.”

“When I was with the Reagan Administration, our desire was to be a good neighbor — [for] the federal government [to] be a good neighbor to local citizens. That’s President Trump’s desire. That’s Secretary Bernhardt’s desire, to be a good neighbor.”

Pendley’s response to Friedman was accidentally omitted in an early version of this post. Also, the headline was clarified.