



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on February 2, 2017

Democrats Delay Pruitt Confirmation for EPA; Republicans Strike Back

“If Scott Pruitt is serious about serving as our next EPA administrator, he should be more than willing to provide Democrats with complete answers,” insisted Senator Tom Carper (D-Del.) in a tweet, after announcing a boycott of a meeting of the Environment and Public Works Committee by all 10 Democrat members of the committee.

The committee’s job is to consider President Donald Trump’s selection of Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt (shown) to lead the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). After the Democrat boycott, the committee chairman, Senator John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), retorted, “It is a disappointing turn of events. This will impact future EPA nominees. The precedent for this delay will likely have longtime impacts after this nominee has left office.”



Senator James Inhofe (R-Okla.), a longtime member of the committee, challenged Carper’s claim that Pruitt has not answered enough questions, noting that the Democrats had submitted over 1,000 questions for him to answer. Senate rules require at least one member of each political party to be present for a committee to conduct business, and Democrats are deliberately boycotting several committees reviewing Trump nominees, in an attempt to obstruct their confirmation.

Without the Democrats present, the Republicans on the committee were reduced to expressing their frustration at the Democrats’ delaying tactics, and displaying a chart which indicated that past EPA nominees had been speedily confirmed.

“The EPA under the Obama administration has failed to give innovators and job creators a seat at the table when developing regulations,” said Inhofe, perhaps the leading critic in Congress of the climate change theory pushed by environmentalists who want heavier regulations of the free market, supposedly to “combat” the alleged global warming they argue is caused by industrial activity. “Under Pruitt’s leadership, EPA will return to an agency that works to protect human health and the environment based on sound science and transparent data while respecting the laws passed by Congress,” Inhofe predicted.

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Pruitt has drawn the ire of environmentalists because in his position as attorney general of Oklahoma, he has been a leader in state litigation against President Obama’s climate rule for power plants, and has also challenged the former president’s water regulations and standards for ground-level ozone pollution, haze, and methane. Obama ordered a 32-percent cut in carbon dioxide emissions by the fossil-



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fuel industries (such as oil, gas, and coal) by 2030. President Trump called the harsh regulations a “war on coal,” and Pruitt said that the plan would shut down numerous coal-fired power plants in Oklahoma and raise the price of electricity for consumers.

“This is an effort that I think is extraordinary in cost, extraordinary in scope, and I think extraordinary as it relates to the intrusion into the sovereignty of the states,” Pruitt stated recently about the rules of Obama’s EPA. He charges that Obama’s actions in commandeering state resources were unconstitutional.

If the Democrats’ actions were restricted to Pruitt, however, one might be inclined to take their objections more seriously. However, it is clear that Democrat boycotts are not against just one nominee, such as Pruitt. It has become obvious that the Democrats have adopted a concerted strategy of throwing up roadblocks to Trump across a broad spectrum. They have expressed anger over his executive order suspending travel into the United States from seven Muslim-majority nations that are currently hotbeds of war, political unrest, and terrorist activity.

When Acting Attorney General Sally Yates refused to enforce the temporary suspension, Trump fired her. She was a holdover from the Obama administration, in place until the Senate confirms Senator Jeff Sessions as attorney general. Radio commentator Rush Limbaugh was critical of Trump this week, contending that he should have gotten rid of her and all other Obama holdovers immediately on day one.

And, of course, Democrats are attempting to pay the Republicans back for not granting a hearing last year to Judge Merrick Garland, Obama’s pick to replace Justice Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court.

“Democrats are going to keep fighting back,” declared Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.). “We are going to stand with people across the country. And we will keep pushing Republicans to put country above party and stand with us.”

Part of the reason for the Democrats’ show of defiance is thought to be their pandering to their base of activists on the Left. Kurt Walters, campaign director of the left-wing group Demand Progress, justified the “radical and bold tactics” of the Democrat senators by arguing that Trump “lost” the popular vote to Democrat presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and is pushing a “radical, unconstitutional agenda.”

Another nominee whose appointment has been delayed is Betsy DeVos, tapped by Trump to head the federal Department of Education (perhaps Kurt Walters should talk about the unconstitutionality of that department!). In the case of DeVos, the Democrats have picked up two Republicans who have indicated they might not vote to confirm her, expressing concern that she is not sufficiently committed to helping public schools. (Again, historically and constitutionally, the question of public schools was a state issue; the federal Department of Education did not even exist until President Jimmy Carter won its passage through Congress as a payoff to the liberal teachers’ unions that supported him in 1976).

Many Republicans, however, are opting to do battle with the Democrats, probably inspired somewhat by the combative personality now occupying the Oval Office. When Democrats tried the boycott tactic to block Trump’s choices to lead the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of the Treasury, respectively (Representative Tom Price, a Georgia Republican, and Steve Mnuchin, a former partner of Goldman Sachs and hedge fund manager), the Republicans retaliated by suspending the rules to push their confirmations through the respective committees.

In other actions, Republicans also pushed out of committee the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to serve as attorney general, and actually confirmed Trump’s pick for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, the



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chief executive of ExxonMobil, by a convincing vote of 56-43. The Tillerson confirmation is thought to illustrate the political realities that there are some Democrats who did notice the election results in November. Two Democrats from states carried by Trump voted for Tillerson: Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota and Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, another Democrat, and Senator Angus King of Maine, a Democrat-leaning Independent, added their votes for Tillerson.

If all the Republicans hold together, Trump's picks will all be confirmed, as the Republicans hold 52 of the 100 seats in the Senate. They could afford to even lose two, since Vice President Mike Pence, in his constitutional role as president of the Senate, could be expected to break the tie in favor of a Trump nominee.

Other Trump nominees who have already won confirmation by the full Senate include Elaine Chao as secretary of transportation, retired General John Kelly at the Department of Homeland Security, retired General Jim Mattis at the Department of Defense, former Texas Governor Rick Perry as secretary of energy (ironically, one of the three departments he claimed in 2012 he wanted to see eliminated), and Representative Ryan Zinke (R-Mont.) as secretary of the interior.

Veteran Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) explained the new, bolder Republican attitude: "We took some unprecedented actions today due to the unprecedented obstruction on the part of our colleagues. Republicans on this committee showed up to do our jobs. Yesterday, rather than accept anything less than their desired outcome, our Democrat colleagues chose to cower in the hallway and hold a press conference. Needless to say, this discussion isn't over. I intend to get the committee back to where it once was, and I will use every tool at my disposal, procedural or otherwise, to make sure this doesn't become the new normal for the Senate Finance Committee."

Many hope that this fighting spirit will be the "new normal" for Republicans in Congress.

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