

Cathy Becker

Rally Against Trump's Climate Denier Cabinet

Monday, January 9, 2017, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Trinity Episcopal Church on Capitol Square

125 E. Broad St. Columbus

This rally was organized by the Central Ohio Climate Action Coalition, which is a loose affiliation of people and organizations in Central Ohio concerned with climate. 350.org asked activists to organize rallies against many of Trump's nominees for cabinet positions who are on the record as denying climate change.

My friend Chuck Lynd did the bulk of the organizing. I told him I would get a representative from Sierra Club to speak, and was told by Sierra Club leaders that they would have someone there. But as the rally time grew closer and closer, and no one from Sierra Club contacted Chuck, I realized that I would likely need to be the speaker. So the night before the rally I looked up information about Trump's cabinet picks and wrote up the attached remarks.

About 70 people attended the rally, which is really good for a Monday morning. It was in the beautiful Trinity Episcopal Church downtown. I am not experienced or trained in public speaking, so I was a little nervous, but I knew I was among friends.

I was the third speaker of the program. First was Elizabeth Brown, member of Columbus City Council, who talked about the ways Columbus is trying to address climate change. To be honest, I was so busy going over my own speech that I didn't catch much of what she said, but she is high profile and her presence on the speaking list helped to turn people out.

Next was Mike Holm, who took over my position as leader of Citizens Climate Lobby Columbus Chapter. I launched that group in late 2014 but could not keep it up with my work and school schedule. It went quiet for awhile, but Mike recently took it over, which I am very glad about.

Then was my turn. In his introduction, Chuck mentioned that I had traveled to Paris for the climate negotiations. That was good because it gave me a starting point to thank Elizabeth Brown for attending, and to recount how 1000 mayors pledged in Paris to go 100 percent renewable by 2050, and we want Columbus to do the same. That line got some applause.

Then I read my remarks, which were basically a list of quotes about climate and environment from Trump's cabinet nominees. In my research, I was surprised to find it wasn't just his picks for offices regarding climate and environment who are climate deniers – it's virtually all of them.

After I spoke were several others, including speakers from Black Lives Matter and Showing up for Racial Justice. I had not realized Chuck pulled in people from these civil rights coalition, but was really glad he did. We need to be building these bridges and highlighting the intersectionality of climate and environmental issues wherever we can.

Next we marched to Senator Portman's office which is a few blocks down the street. We didn't really have any great chants – maybe it was too early in the morning, or we were too nerdy.

Five of us went in to meet with an aide to Senator Portman while others stayed outside to demonstrate. We met with Jason Knox, assistant to the state director. At first he tried to meet

with us in the entryway to Portman's office, rather than taking us back to an office, which is the third time a staffer for an elected official has done this to a meeting I have been involved with. Others I know have been reporting this too, so this looks like a new tactic for them to hurry us along and not have to actually listen to our concerns. In this case, both Chuck and Mike objected, and maybe because they are older white men, Jason Knox relented and took us back.

The meeting went for about 30 minutes, with the minutes taken by Mike attached at the end of this document. We each got to speak to our concerns about the various cabinet picks, with all of us specifically urging Portman to vote no on Tillerson, Perry, and Pruitt.

I don't personally have a lot of hope that Portman will vote no on any of these picks. He goes along with every Republican vote unless it affects him personally such as his son turning out to be gay. We gave it our best shots to argue aspects of climate that are important to Republicans – jobs, conservation, energy efficiency, etc. But until millions of people march for climate, or our campaign finance system gets overhauled, or renewables become so cheap they take over, I don't see a lot changing, especially under the current administration.

Still, rallies like this do help highlight the importance of this issue for the public, and raise awareness. Most people understand that climate change is real and caused by humans, but it isn't a priority for them as other issues like jobs, health care and civil rights. That is why we have to work on the intersectionality of climate change as much as we can. We have to get climate change into the conversation where it doesn't normally get brought up.

This rally did get a nice [article in the Huffington Post](#). The author asked us to send her our prepared remarks, but I didn't manage to get mine to her in time. I saw the request on the phone, and couldn't figure out how to get a document attached to the response email. With so much else going on, I then forgot about it until after I saw the story, and by then it was too late. This taught me another lesson of activism – just preparing for and doing the event is not enough. There will always be follow-up. Hopefully next time I will be in a better position to do this.

TRUMP CLIMATE DENIER CABINET IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Good morning!

My name is Cathy Cowan Becker, and I am with the Ohio Chapter of the Sierra Club. I think it's pretty obvious why we are all here. Donald Trump has nominated the most extreme cabinet in history.

As each nomination has been announced, it's almost as if he is picking people hellbent on destroying the government agency they are being put in charge of. It's like he's casting characters for the most dangerous reality TV show in history.

This cabinet poses a threat to everything – to civil rights of minorities, reproductive rights for women, access to health care, labor rights, animal welfare ... the list goes on. But perhaps nothing is as clear as the threat to the planet.

To give you an idea, I'm going to read what some of Trump's cabinet nominees have said about climate change in their own words.

Scott Pruitt, nominee for administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, is leading a lawsuit against the very agency he hopes to run, because he wants to overturn President Obama's Clean Power Plan.

Here's what he said about that:

"The Clean Power Plan is an unlawful attempt to expand federal bureaucrats' authority over states' energy economies in order to shutter coal-fired power plants and eventually other sources of fossil-fuel generated electricity." [Pruitt press release, 7/1/15]

Here's what he said about climate change:

"Scientists continue to disagree about the degree and extent of global warming and its connection to the actions of mankind. That debate should be encouraged -- in classrooms, public forums, and the halls of Congress." [Pruitt *National Review* op-ed, 5/17/16]

In reality, 97% of climate scientists agree that climate change is real, caused by human activity, and poses an existential threat. Meanwhile, **Pruitt has taken over \$250,000 in campaign donations from the oil and gas industry.**

Rick Perry, nominee for Secretary of Energy, is a longtime climate denier.

While he was Texas governor, the state Commission on Environmental Quality scrubbed all references to climate change from a report on rising sea levels.

Here's what Perry said about climate change:

"I do believe that the issue of global warming has been politicized. I think that there are a substantial number of scientists who have manipulated data so that they will have dollars rolling into their projects. And I think we are seeing almost weekly, or even daily, scientists who are coming forward and questioning the original idea that manmade global warming is what is causing the climate to change." [Perry campaign speech via CBS News, 8/17/11]

Perry has also called for getting rid of the Department of Energy – though he infamously couldn't remember the name of the department he wants to get rid of during a 2011 presidential debate.

Rex Tillerson, nominee for Secretary of State, is the CEO of Exxon Corporation, the most profitable oil company in history. Exxon scientists determined that carbon emissions would change the climate back in the 1970s – but instead of finding a new business model, Exxon chose to spend its profits on funding climate denial for decades, delaying action on climate while feedback loops piled up. For that Exxon is being investigated under RICO statutes by several state attorneys general.

Tillerson's views on climate are actually more moderate than those of his peers. He somewhat acknowledges that climate change is happening, but he thinks we can adapt our way out of it, so there's no need to reduce use of fossil fuels.

"We have spent our entire existence adapting, OK?" he said in 2012. "So we will adapt to this. It's an engineering problem, and it has engineering solutions. The fear factor that people want to throw out there to say we just have to stop this, I do not accept." [Speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, 6/27/12]

Rep. Mike Pompeo, nominee for Director of the CIA, is another climate denier. Last year Pompeo called the Paris agreement “a radical climate change deal.”

Here’s what he said about climate change:

“Look, I think the science needs to continue to develop. I’m happy to continue to look at it. There are scientists who think lots of different things about climate change. There’s some who think we’re warming, there’s some who think we’re cooling, there’s some who think that the last 16 years have shown a pretty stable climate environment.” [C-SPAN interview, 6/25/13]

On the contrary, the planet has warmed by almost a full degree Celsius since the Industrial Revolution. The last three years have each been the hottest year on record, and the 2000s were the hottest decade, with the 2010s set to be even hotter.

One more.

Lt. General Michael Flynn, nominee for National Security Advisor, has railed against the idea that climate change should be a national security priority.

Here’s what he said about climate change shortly after the shootings in Orlando:

"And here we have the President of the United States up in Canada talking about climate change. I mean, God, we just had the largest attack ... on our own soil in Orlando. Why aren't we talking about that? Who is talking about that? I mean, Fort Hood, Chattanooga, Boston, people forget about 9/11!" [Fox News, [6/29/16](#)]

Meanwhile, the Pentagon has described climate change as an “immediate threat” and a “threat multiplier” that could cause crops to fail, spark mass refugee movements, and increase conflict for dwindling water resources— while extreme weather costs billions, and rising sea levels threaten U.S. military bases.

This is why we have to stop Trump’s climate denier cabinet. Not only are they completely misinformed and unprepared for the job, they are dangerous – to Americans, to people around the world, and to all living species.

Meeting occurred on January 9, 2017, from 11:40 a.m. To 12:20 p.m.

Those in attendance:

Central Ohio Climate Action Network

Mac Crawford – Clintonville Energy Collaborative

Chuck Lynd – Simply Living

Cathy Cowan Becker – Sierra Club

Ginny Vogts – Showing Up for Racial Justice

Mike Holm – Citizens Climate Lobby

Sen. Portman's office

Jason Knox, Assistant to the State Director and Deputy Scheduler

Jason came out to the outer room (with a coat rack and two chairs), introduced himself and asked us to proceed. Chuck asked if we might avoid a standing meeting and meet in a conference room or office, whereupon Jason agreed and brought us all to the conference room. (He later apologized for not bringing us in directly). Jason also took notes throughout the meeting.

Chuck started the meeting by describing the day's events, the nature of the coalition and a reference to “fusion politics,” a term coined by **Rev. William Barber**. Jason asked for written information and Chuck agreed to email the press release to him.

Mac then talked about the importance of moving from fossil fuel to renewable energy, described how his organization is working to bring solar energy to Clintonville and suggested that collaborative initiatives like these are part of the solution to the fossil fuel crisis. He talked about the President-Elect's nominations for State (**Rex Tillerson**), Energy (**Rick Perry**) and EPA (**Scott Pruitt**), claiming that **Tillerson's** ties to Exxon, **Pruitt's** ties to oil and gas and **Perry's** lack of qualifications to work with nuclear power (**Mac** mentioned that he is an OSU professor and a member of the Union of Concerned Scientists) made them unacceptable choices for these positions.

Cathy then discussed some of the economic aspects of climate change, mentioned that the coal industry was failing and that wind and solar energy development was very important for Ohio's economy, describing it as a “huge economic opportunity.” **Cathy** also warned that India and China were going full steam with renewable energy development and that the U.S. could be left behind if Washington continues to ignore climate change over continued oil and gas exploration, development and use. She said that too many of the president-elect's cabinet are climate deniers, including **Tillerson** (who has recently said favorable things about carbon tax and climate change research), mostly due to his role in Exxon's 40-year disinformation campaign.

Mike said that 50,000 people die every year from respiratory disease related to coal pollution, that with all the discussion of the science behind climate change and pollution, so far no scientist has proven that pollution is good for you. Then he asked **Jason** why, with the obvious benefits of clean energy, would anyone want to continue with fossil fuel pollution. **Mike** then briefly

described Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL) as a non-partisan, international, volunteer, grass-roots organization focused on changing Washington policy by implementing CCL's Carbon Fee and Dividend plan, which is designed to collect fees on CO2 emissions and return that money to American households as dividends. **Cathy**, also a CCL member, estimated a household monthly dividend of around \$400 by 2025. Mike suggested that if the playing field were leveled – with no subsidies for fossil fuel or renewables and fees to capture missing markets (like health issues from pollution), then renewables would win in a fair fight and suggested that this kind of marketplace freedom is something to which conservatives should respond favorably. **Mike** then said that **Tillerson, Perry and Pruitt** were unacceptable candidates, primarily because of **Tillerson's** ties with Russia and his history with Exxon, **Perry** because of his lack of qualifications and limited education with respect to one of the most scientific agencies in the federal government, and **Pruitt**, because of large contributions to his 2014 campaign (7th largest in US for AGs, ran unopposed) and his collaboration with **Harold G. Hamm** with other oil and gas billionaires to lead the challenge to EPA's Clean Power Plan. He also made a plea for the Senate to not rush the confirmation process,

Ginny said that Showing Up for Racial Justice was all about people who are marginalized, that the poor were hurt the worst from climate change – with poorly insulated dwellings, little hope of getting solar power or renewable energy, reliance on public transportation, food deserts right here in Columbus, increased asthma rates. Poor people of color, she said, were the most vulnerable and suffer the most from a problem (climate change) to which they were lesser contributors.

Chuck then talked about Simply Living's (SL) commitment to smart cities, explaining that his organization is a values-based organization that works with a variety of issues related to sustainability and initiatives that favor local economies, SL works with Ohio Sustainable Business Council (as large box stores close, neighborhoods are left with medium and smaller business that have a hard time competing).

Jason closed out the meeting by thanking everyone for coming, summarizing that our consensus was that **Tillerson, Pruitt and Perry** should not get Senate consent. He also explained that there is no statement yet from **Sen. Portman** regarding the **Tillerson, Pruitt and Perry** nominations but that there have been a lot of calls and messages about these nominees as well as the speeding up of the process. **Jason** said that **Sen. Portman** would reach out to environmental policy staff and will look at the merits of each nominee.