

Here's What Scott Pruitt Told EPA Staffers on His First Day on the Job

President Donald Trump's new EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt, got a much warmer reception from career agency employees Tuesday than he got from Democrats in the Senate during his confirmation process.

After being introduced by former acting administrator Catherine McCabe, the longtime critic of the EPA received a round of applause from those who will be working for him on a daily basis. The evangelical Christian now charged with enacting the president's regulatory reforms while maintaining good stewardship of the environment approached his task with an appropriate level of humility.

"You don't know me very well. In fact, you don't know me hardly at all other than what you've read in the newspaper and seen on the news," he said. "I look forward to sharing the rest of the story with you as we spend time together.

"This is a beginning. It's a beginning for us to spend time and discuss certain principles by which I think this agency should conduct itself."

Earlier in the day, Pruitt had been visiting with career EPA staff in his office, and noted in his "welcome aboard speech" that he recognized their dedication to their work. He then explained to them his leadership style.

"I seek to listen, learn and lead with you to address the issues we face as a nation," he said. "You can't lead unless you listen. Civility is something I believe in very much. We ought to be able to get together and wrestle through some very difficult issues and do so in a civil manner.

“In this environment we live in this country today, it’s a very toxic environment. We have jerseys that we put on, both politically and otherwise. And that’s something, I think, is damaging to finding results and answers.”

Pruitt also addressed the very large elephant in the room: regulatory reform.

“Regulations ought to make things regular,” he said. “Regulators exist to give certainty to those that they regulate. Those that we regulate ought to know what we expect of them, so that they can plan and allocate resources to comply.

“That’s really the job of the regulator, and the process we engage in. I seek to ensure that we engender the trust of those at the state level, that those at the state level see us as partners and not as adversaries...

“The only authority that any agency has in the executive branch is the authority given to it by Congress. We need to respect that. We need to follow that. Because when we do that, guess what happens? We avoid litigation. We avoid the uncertainty of litigation and we reach better ends and outcomes at the end of the day.”

In closing, Pruitt shared his vision for how protecting the environment can still work hand-in-hand with growing the U.S. economy. He said it’s not a matter of choosing between energy and jobs or the environment.

“I think our nation has done better than any nation in the world at making sure that we do the job of protecting our natural resources, and protecting our environment, while also respecting economic growth,” he said. {eo}