

Trump's New Climate Czar: Carbon Dioxide Has Been Treated Just Like "Jews Under Hitler"

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By Kenzie Bryant



Last year, on the Friday after Thanksgiving, the Trump administration released a terrifying report about climate change, which might as well have been simply titled, "You Should Be Shitting Your Pants Right Now." The second volume of a federally mandated assessment, the 1,656-page investigation laid out the devastating costs associated with not taking immediate steps to combat climate change: \$141 billion from heat-related deaths, \$118 billion from rising sea levels, \$32 billion from infrastructure damage by the end of the century, and so on. At the time, **Donald Trump** simply brushed the whole thing off, telling reporters, "I don't believe it," even though, by his own admission, he'd only read "some" of the report and his mind was probably elsewhere during the relevant sections (i.e. wondering if all the turkeys he didn't pardon were going to rise up and peck him to death) But with certain lawmakers, irksome citizens, and, um, the director of national intelligence insisting that climate change is the most imminent threat of our lifetime, the White House knew it needed to do more to convince people this whole thing was a hoax. And reader, the administration has *truly* outdone itself this time.

The Washington Post reports that the White House is assembling a panel to "assess whether climate change poses a national security threat," headed by a guy who makes coal lobbyist-turned-Acting E.P.A. Administrator **Andrew Wheeler** look like a radical environmentalist. Yes, the administration has hired some real crackpots before, but this guy laps those suckers by miles. So, just who is **William Happer**? According to the *Post*, he's a

former Energy Department staffer under George H.W. Bush who joined this White House in September to work on “emerging technologies,” and, naturally, has no formal training as a climate scientist. But what he lacks in relevant knowledge he makes up for in a deep and abiding love for carbon dioxide, which he said during a summit in December 2016 is “not a pollutant at all” and is “actually a benefit to the earth,” despite having been unfairly maligned by “decade after decade of abuse, for no reason.” And, of course, he thinks that abuse has some historical parallels.

“The demonization of carbon dioxide is just like the demonization of the poor Jews under Hitler,” Happer explained to CNBC in 2014, after yelling at **Andrew Ross Sorkin** to “shut up” about him supposedly being a climate-change denier. In January 2017, he added in an e-mail to a Jezebel reader that the vilification of carbon dioxide also “differs little from . . . the Soviet extermination of class enemies or ISIL slaughter of infidels.” (Upon learning that Jezebel would be writing an item about the correspondence and his views, he responded, “If I understand the thrust of the article you are writing, your organization is well named. The original Queen Jezebel had an innocent man, Naboth, smeared and stoned to death so her husband, King Ahab, could steal his vineyard [sic]. You can smear me, as the original Jezebel did, but if you want to physically destroy me, you may find it [a] bit harder.”)

Other choice quotes from Happer, who, shockingly, has received money from the fossil-fuel industry:

- “If plants could vote, they would vote for coal.” November 2015
- “It’s not as though if you double CO2 you make a big difference. You make a barely detectable difference.” November 2017
- “Let me point out that if you have a well-designed coal plant, what comes out of the stack of the plant is almost the same thing that comes out of a person’s breath.” December 2016
- “I am trying to explain to my fellow Americans the serious damage that will be done to us, and indeed to the whole world, by cockamamie policies to ‘save the planet’ from CO2.” March 2016
- “Warming and increased CO2 will be good for mankind.” May 2010

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The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the N.S.C., the Pentagon, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence all declined the *Post’s* requests for comment. In an interview with the paper, **Francesco Femia**, chief executive officer of the Council on Strategic Risks and co-founder of the Center for Climate & Security, called the Happer-spearheaded panel

“the equivalent of setting up a committee on nuclear-weapons proliferation and having someone lead it who doesn’t think nuclear weapons exist,” which, presumably, is exactly what the administration was going for.

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Tax season is pretty sweet (if you’re a corporation benefiting from Trump’s massive tax cuts)

Axios reports that as Fortune 500 companies begin filing their annual regulatory reports, “a pattern is emerging”: giant multi-nationals paying *very* little in taxes or getting a sizable refund. The stats so far include:

- U.S. Steel claiming a \$303 million refund on \$957 million in profit
- G.M. claiming a refund of \$104 million on \$11.8 billion in profit
- Goodyear claiming a \$15 million refund on \$693 million in profit
- Netflix claiming a \$22.1 million refund on \$845 million in profit
- Halliburton paying \$19 million in taxes on \$1.6 billion profit

Hopefully next year Halliburton will find a way to do better.

Guy hired to babysit Elon Musk can’t take it anymore

Back in September, Tesla founder Elon Musk seemingly engaged in some light securities fraud when he allegedly lied on Twitter about securing financing to take Tesla private, which, as the C.E.O. of a public company, was a big no-no. That resulted in a settlement with the Securities and Exchange Commission that involved a \$20 million fine for Telsa, a \$20 million fine for Musk, Musk being banned as chairman for three years, and the S.E.C. requiring the company to hire or appoint “an experienced securities lawyer” to review all social-media missives by senior officers, i.e., Musk. That guy started his job in December—and lasted eight weeks:

Tesla Inc. announced its general counsel, **Dane Butswinkas**, is leaving Wednesday, two months after hiring him in the wake of Musk’s run-in with U.S. securities regulators. Hours before that news, the chief executive officer was sending tweets reminiscent of those that put him and the company in legal jeopardy last year, leading to a settlement that was supposed to result in oversight of posts that were material to the electric-car maker . . . The departure came on the heels of a production projection Musk tweeted, then backtracked from, late Tuesday. The developments renew concerns about retention of key executives and the C.E.O.’s social-media habits—issues that distracted from Tesla’s manufacturing achievements in 2018.

The official line for Butswinkas’s departure is that he’s leaving “due to a poor cultural fit,” which sounds about right. Neither the S.E.C. nor Tesla commented on Musk’s most recent tweets.

In the future, UBS will probably refrain from helping clients evade taxes

We mean probably:

UBS Group AG was ordered to pay more than 4.5 billion euros (\$5.1 billion) by a Paris court that found the bank guilty of helping wealthy French clients stash undeclared funds in Swiss accounts . . . The Paris criminal court ruled on Wednesday that UBS illegally laundered funds by providing French customers with banking services to hide assets from tax authorities. The judges fined UBS 3.7 billion euros and added another 800 million euros in compensation to the French government.

UBS has denied wrongdoing and said it will appeal the case, which will delay the need to pay the fine until higher courts make a final ruling. That's a good thing for the bank as, per Bloomberg, it had "only set aside \$640 million for litigation and other regulatory matters at its wealth management unit."

Vladimir Putin thinks it's so unfair when honest oligarchs are threatened with jail time

American investors? Not so much:

Russian President Vladimir Putin said honest business people shouldn't have to live under "constant fear of criminal prosecution," days after the arrest of one of the country's top foreign investors. Echoing previous exhortations to officials and law enforcement to stop harassing business, which have produced few results, Putin said Wednesday in his annual state-of-the-nation address that "detention is often extended without good reason" and almost half of cases "don't even make it to court."

But he didn't mention Baring Vostok Capital Partners founder **Michael Calvey**, the American private-equity investor who's in pre-trial detention as the latest prominent business figure to face prosecution. While senior officials and bankers in Russia have urged Calvey's release, Putin's spokesman, **Dmitry Peskov**, said Monday the Kremlin doesn't believe the case will hurt Russia's investment climate, though it's following events closely.

Elsewhere!

Facing ethics violation, Wilbur Ross says he didn't mean to file inaccurate financial disclosures (*The Washington Post*)

Trump's shutdown could hinder tax collectors for 'months, and even years' (*The Washington Post*)

Bernie Sanders raises nearly \$6 million in 24 hours after 2020 launch, campaign says (CNN)

Ex-White House chief of staff John Kelly and ex-White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci are having a chat in Vegas ()

Deutsche Bank Lost \$1.6 Billion on a Muni-Bond Bet (*W.S.J.*)

Trump Continues to Weigh E.U. Auto Tariffs (*W.S.J.*)

Rarest U.S. bills in existence set for multi-million-dollar auction (*N.Y.P.*)

State Street sues *Fearless Girl* sculptor (New York Business Journal)

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