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Scientist Who Rejects Warming Is Named to EPA Advisory Board

John Christy has advocated for the repeal of regulations on greenhouse gas emissions

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By Scott Waldman, E&E News on February 1, 2019



Credit: Getty Images

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The Earth will benefit from burning more fossil fuels and regulations on greenhouse gases must be challenged, one of EPA's newest science advisers said yesterday.

John Christy, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Alabama, Huntsville, was one of the first to push the federal government to conduct a "red team, blue team" debate on climate science. That was a decade ago. Now he wants to use his new perch on the agency's Science Advisory Board to challenge climate science consensus.

"There's a benefit, not a cost, to producing energy from carbon," Christy said in an interview yesterday, after EPA announced his membership on the board.

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Christy, who is a frequent critic of EPA regulations, said he will use his position on the 45-member board to question the results of climate models. He's a frequent speaker at conservative think tanks that promote the notion that worldwide temperature increases are largely unrelated to human activity.

So how did Christy get a seat on the board?

EPA officials asked him to apply, he said.

"In a fair, open, and transparent fashion, EPA reviewed hundreds of qualified applicants nominated for this committee," acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said in a statement. "Members who will be appointed or reappointed include experts from a wide variety of scientific disciplines who reflect the geographic diversity needed to represent all ten EPA regions."

When asked what his first priority would be as a member of the SAB, Christy said he would try to convince his colleagues that nature is responsible for rising temperatures, not people.

“I think it would be to demonstrate to the board what we know about climate and its variability and what’s really going on,” Christy said. “And secondly is our inability to characterize it well with our models.”

The Trump administration has been stacking EPA’s science advisory boards with researchers and consultants whose work is often funded or promoted by industry. It has reached out to critics of climate science and air pollution regulations to serve on the boards.

Most climate scientists would say that Christy is wrong when he asserts that climate models overestimate warming. The models match up well with real-world observations, said Gavin Schmidt, director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies.



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Christy and other critics have focused on a particular version of climate satellite data when arguing that planetary warming is less severe than scientists have stated, Schmidt said. An examination of surface temperature data, ocean heat content, sea ice trends, sea levels and more shows that the Earth is warming at a rapid pace and setting historical records, he said.

In earlier research, Christy and a colleague claimed that the Earth was cooling. That’s been

proved false. In fact, the past four years have been the warmest on record.

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Christy said he wants EPA to revoke regulations related to greenhouse gases. He described the endangerment finding, which is the scientific underpinning for the agency's climate rules, as being scientifically flawed.

“I think the endangerment finding is one that doesn't stand on the best science that we have out there, mainly because the best science is expressing tremendous uncertainties we have on this issue,” Christy said. “The overconfidence we have on the climate issue in the climate community is incredibly large, and we need to pull back on that.”

Challenging the endangerment finding would require a mountain of alternative climate science. The Trump administration has so far shown no desire to take that on, even as prominent opponents to climate regulations have pushed for a court battle.

That's because the endangerment finding is bulletproof, Schmidt said.

“If they want to waste their time going after the endangerment finding, they're just wasting their time, and better that they waste their time than they do something actually destructive,” he said.

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Scott Waldman

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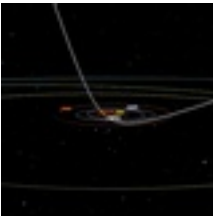
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