

## Donald Trump defends climate sceptic, labour picks



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Fast food executive Andy Puzder is Trump's pick for labour secretary.

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Donald Trump yesterday vigorously defended his incoming cabinet against uproar from Democrats, green activists and unions who claim his nominees for the environment and labour posts signalled a sharp shift to the Right. The 70-year-old president-elect yesterday announced Oklahoma Attorney-General Scott Pruitt, a climate sceptic, as environment chief and fast food executive Andy Puzder as labour secretary.

More than half his cabinet positions have been filled, 43 days before the Republican is sworn in as 45th US president. "I believe we're in the process of putting together one of the great cabinets that has ever been assembled in the history of our nation," Mr Trump told a victory rally in Des Moines, Iowa. It was the third of his "thank you" rallies feting his defeat of Hillary Clinton in key swing states. "In filling my cabinet I'm looking for people who fully understand the meaning of service and who are committed to advancing the common good," he said.

His nominees, he said, had given up fortunes "to make one dollar a year," hailing them as "talented people, smart people".

Mr Trump triggered criticism by tapping a fossil fuel industry ally to head the Environmental Protection Agency — outraging many who fear he will reverse President Barack Obama's efforts to combat climate change.

"We're going to end the EPA intrusion into your lives," he told the Iowa crowd. Announcing the nomination of Mr Pruitt, Mr Trump complained that "for too long," the EPA had spent "taxpayer dollars on an out-of-control anti-energy agenda that has destroyed millions of jobs".

Steny Hoyer, the number two Democrat in the House of Representatives, said Mr Pruitt had spent years "fighting tooth and nail to help polluters erase or circumvent the critical environmental protections our nation has put in place". Union of Concerned Scientists president Ken Kimmell described Mr Pruitt as someone "on the outer extreme edge, and putting him in charge of EPA could really have devastating consequences".

There was similar uproar over Mr Trump's nomination of Mr Puzder, chief executive of CKE Restaurants which owns fast food chain Hardees, as labour secretary. Mr Puzder opposes a Democratic Party push to raise the minimum wage to \$US15 (\$20) an hour and has backed the use of automated technology to keep down labour costs. "The president-elect believes, as do I, the right government policies can result in more jobs and better wages for the American worker," he said yesterday.

Service Employees International Union head Mary Kay Henry, whose organisation has 2 million members, hit back, saying: "Trump has once again shown how out-of-touch he is with what working Americans need. We will stay in the streets to fight back against anti-worker extremism."

In a move that fanned concerns about his conflict of interest as a tycoon, Mr Trump plans to stay on as executive producer on *Celebrity Apprentice* when it returns after a two-year absence. The real estate tycoon has promised to set out a plan next Friday to put aside his "great business in total".

In Iowa he invited onto the stage Governor Terry Branstad, a long-time Trump supporter and personal friend of Chinese President Xi Jinping who has been nominated to serve as ambassador to Beijing. "One of the most important relations we must improve and we have to improve, is our relationship with China," said Mr Trump, who ruffled Beijing's feathers last week by taking a phone call from Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen.

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