

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA & GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

ETM SBU 030

Transcript of an Interview

Conducted by

Christopher Sellers

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

INTERVIEWEE: Mike Cox

INTERVIEWER: Christopher Sellers

DATE: April 14, 2017

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<T: 5 min>

INTERVIEWER: All right. So the first – now into the interview questions; the good part. First a little background on you about your age, your racial ethnic identification, and your gender.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure. I'm 60. I'm a white male. Yeah, okay.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What about – tell me a little bit about your formal education including dates of degrees and that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure. I got a bachelor's of science in environmental study from Western Washington University in 1981. Then I got a master's in public health and toxicology from the University of Michigan in 1987.

INTERVIEWER: '87.

INTERVIEWEE: '87.

INTERVIEWER: So you – how you – what is your sort of self-identification professionally speaking? Are you a scientist or policy person? How did you—

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, I started out as a scientist and toxicologist, but then transitioned more into manager I would say; a program manager.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, I will ask little bit more about that. When did you – what was the year you first came to the EPA?

INTERVIEWEE: I started in 1987.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, so right after your masters you...

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. I got my masters and then went right to Washington DC and started working.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any other jobs before that?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, I had lots of jobs. Like professional jobs or I could go through the long list of jobs. What kind are you looking for?

INTERVIEWER: Well, I guess was there a sort of place that. Like before you went back to your masters I guess, was there sort of a—just give me the main thrust of whatever jobs you had just briefly.

<T: 10 min>

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, sure. Okay.

INTERVIEWER: I mean, it's not a big deal.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, I will do briefly. I grew up in Eastern Washington state, Walla Walla; farming community. I worked for years in fields. Worked in canneries. Worked in making cans. Worked in making pivot irrigation. Worked in a lumber mill.

Worked in a meat slaughtering plant. I did a host of things while I was going to college and when I wasn't going to college. At all related to Walla Walla.

Then I went to Peace Corps. After undergraduate, I would to Peace Corps in East Africa. I was a teacher there for a number of years. Then came back and did miscellaneous jobs; valet parker. Then went to graduate school.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. So you really did. You are right. You had a lot of jobs before grad school—

INTERVIEWEE: I had a lot of jobs. Yeah. Yeah, I had lots of jobs.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So tell me a little bit about how you first came to EPA and how you sort of—you said you got that job right out of grad school. Tell me a little bit more about that process.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. When I was in grad school in Michigan, I was in a program. It was only two of us actually. Sort of a joint program with toxicology and then policy. So a number of the other people before us who had been in that program were working at EPA. I contacted them. They got me in touch with—there were some jobs there. I applied for the jobs, and because I was a Peace Corps volunteer, former Peace Corps volunteer, I had noncompetitive eligibility which helped.

INTERVIEWER: What's that? I missed that.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. What that was at the time, I don't even know if it's still around; if you are a Peace Corps volunteer, I can't member the timeframe, but if you come and apply for jobs you can have something called noncompetitive eligibility. In other words, if there is a job and you're qualified for that job, you can get preference for that job.

INTERVIEWER: In the federal government? Any place?

INTERVIEWEE: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: Correct. That helped, to be perfectly honest. People that were in the program also didn't really know me, but then—the program and I guess they vouched for me. So I got the job in Washington DC. It was my first job.

INTERVIEWER: So what were you—what part of the EPA was it?

INTERVIEWEE: The first job I had was something called the Office of Policy Planning and Evaluation. I always characterize it as the—this was again, during the Reagan administration. We were kind of—we would call ourselves the mini—well, people called us the mini OMB, Office of Management and Budget, because we reviewed—I reviewed hazardous waste and solid waste regulations and looked at the cost-benefit analysis and then try to provide some comments in areas where people might think about modifying the regulation. So we were kind of a mini OMB and I did that for a couple of years; two years.

INTERVIEWER: So was that a part of a mini OMB, that was part of the administrator's office or where?

INTERVIEWEE: No, it was called the Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, so that is a separate—that is an office.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. That was a separate office called the Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation. They had different branches and it. A lot of statisticians in there. Mine was specific on hazardous waste and solid waste and so we would review those rates for looking at the cost-benefit and providing some input on what we thought they might modify in order to make it more cost-effective.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Now, just the thing back for a moment in terms of when you were first sort of, I guess you interviewed for the job and then—soon, or not so soon; sometime thereafter you walked in the door. In that sort of interval, what were you expecting in terms of an EPA job or going to work for this place more generally?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. It was a while ago, but I —

INTERVIEWER: And what we sort of – did you – I mean, in terms of your aspirations too, for the job.

INTERVIEWEE: No, I had wanted to be working in public service and the environmental fields for a long time since I got interested in college. It's a place I really wanted to work and so going there, to be honest, was a little intimidating just in the fact that I had never lived on the East Coast. So when I got there I was sort of up or not up. I was working with people that had gone to Harvard and all these places so I was a little intimidated at the beginning. That was quickly—found out quickly that hey, that was nothing I needed to worry about, that I could compete and work with these folks.

So yeah, it was—but on the other hand, the office I was with was very collegial; lots of younger folks. So we did a lot together and it was a nice transition to DC.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So what were your tasks and responsibilities there in the early years or first year just getting started with the EPA?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. My task was to look at a regulation. Let's say just as an example, there was a regulation called location standards and they were trying to figure out where should you locate solid and hazardous waste sites. So my job was to look at that regulation, or proposed regulation, and every regulation, as you may know, had to have a cost-benefit analysis here so my job was really to look at that cost-benefit analysis that was done, evaluate seeing what the risks were from that site, how much the particular reg would ameliorate those risks, and at what cost.

So I would look at that and then try to understand the regulation. Then if I did the areas that maybe the risks were very low for example, but it was going to cost a lot, I would comment on that to the program offices that were actually doing the regulations. So it was really reviewing a lot of cost-benefit analysis.

INTERVIEWER: So who did the cost-benefit analysis that you reviewed? Did you do some of that?

INTERVIEWEE: No, this is generally contractors for the different program offices. So different contractors like ICF or FCIC or some of the big contractors in DC would do the analysis. Then –

INTERVIEWER: So these were like consulting firms or accountancy firms?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, consulting firms. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Consulting firms.

INTERVIEWEE: Environmental consulting firms, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So they would – was it your office that would farm the proposal out to the consulting firm or was it some other part of EPA?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. No, it was—It was a program officer. So each area in the EPA; they have an Air Office, a Water Office, a Superfund Office. So it would be the actual program offices that would do that. They had people that would manage those contracts; those risk evaluation – RIAs so: risk... I can't remember what the name of the more, but basically cost-benefit analysis.

INTERVIEWER: You did most of these for hazardous and solid waste; which was sort of the area where you are looking at the cost-benefit analysis of new regulations. Is this—

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, they were new regulations or ones that maybe were being revised, but they were—they had not been proposed yet. So this was the pre-proposal stage of these.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, so this is even before they had been sort of announced in the Federal Register as a proposal, they had to go through this process.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, it's an internal process that we went through that just—that would go— Well, most of the regulations I did, we did that too. You go to an internal review before you would ever go out public.

INTERVIEWER: So you were kind of, I mean, you had a scientific background yourself. How did that come into play in your work? This review of the cost-benefit?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I was a toxicologist by training, but I'd taken epidemiology and statistics and the basic physiology and pharmacology and all that so understood the – and when I did my undergraduate toxicology, we learned a lot about the risk assessment process and how you evaluate a risk. So I had a pretty good understanding of that side, of the risk side. The economic side; in grad school, I also had to take some economics classes as a part of my degree so I had little bit of an understanding there.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you did take economics also as part of the—

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, I took a couple of basic – well, not basic; graduate school economic classes, so I could understand both the risk side, but also the cost and economic side.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work with other—were there other sort of scientists? What kind of... Who were your colleagues in terms of other scientists?

<T: 20 min>

Were there policy people? What was their sort of professional background?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, in my office there was a range. There was a number of economic and policy. Probably the majority were policy, but as I said, the people that helped me get the job had also belonged to the same program so they were more like I was; kind of both sides. Understanding the health and risk side, but also having a good understanding of economics. So, I was a mostly policy, economics, but then there was a couple of us who had more of a health, public health background.

INTERVIEWER: Well, okay. So how, what about political influences in this early time? What do you remember about any of those? All or any of those?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. To be honest, I was just so new and so kind of, "What the hell am I doing here?" type of thing; I didn't really notice that much to be honest. I was just trying to figure out what I was supposed to do and get adjusted to a new city and a new life. So I can't really... I don't have much recollection of those first two years in terms of that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any recollections in terms of your own work with people in other agencies?

INTERVIEWEE: In those first two years, not really. It was mostly internal EPA folks that are dealt with. So for those it was very little outside contact.

INTERVIEWER: With Congress, Congress people or staff, or that kind of thing, did you ever get—

INTERVIEWEE: Now, not—again, I was so low on the totem pole that I was—I was way down there.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So that would be a no, I guess.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, a no.

INTERVIEWER: I guess it's the same for sort of higher up, like the administrator's office or the actual OMB in the White House, that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. No, I didn't have that until my next job I did have a little bit more that which I assume we will get to.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Yeah, so I think, could you just walk me through, real quick, the different positions you had and when you shifted in the EPA? Is that a lot? Is that a lot? I just want to...

INTERVIEWEE: So, it's a long one.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: I did a lot of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So you were there two years in this first place. Then I understand you're like 10 years at the headquarters and then you moved out to Washington or to the—

INTERVIEWEE: Well, do you want me to just walk through real quick the chronology?

INTERVIEWER: Okay. I guess we better do that.

INTERVIEWEE: It will be quick. I will make it quick. So in '87, '89, I did the job we were describing then I shifted over from '89 to 1991 and I was what we called the regulation manager for the lead and copper drinking water—national drinking water rule for lead and copper. I came in and I was the one who managed

the, within a group of two other people, the final rule, the final lead and copper rule. So I did that. That was interesting and it's obviously back in the news or has been in the news—

Then after that I quit EPA and my wife had a job in West Africa, Togo. So I went with her and eventually, after I had learned a little modicum of French, got a job with UNICEF, Nations Children's Fund, and worked there. Then I came back and we moved back to D.C. and I worked on a regulation called the Great Lakes Water Quality Initiative.

INTERVIEWER: When did that start? Your back in DC job?

INTERVIEWEE: Back in DC in '93.

INTERVIEWER: '93.

INTERVIEWEE: From '93 to '95 I worked on the Great Lakes Water Quality Initiative. I was one of the three people doing that. Then that was finalized in '95 and then I worked on two main things from '95 to '99. There was something called the National Drinking Water Regulation and Disinfection Byproducts that I was the regulation manager for. Then I also worked with our office of research and development and office of water to develop a research plan for figuring out what research we needed to do to help us complete drinking water regulations and the drinking water program. So I did those.

Then in 99, moved out to Seattle where I got a job managing the drinking water program for EPA Region 10. So I did that for four years and then I got a job in the City of Seattle as an intergovernmental transfer for three years. I worked in the Office of Sustainability in the City of Seattle which is out of the mayor's office, for three years. Then came back and then managed a group of folks in Region 10, the science and technical people for the region. I managed that group for five years.

INTERVIEWER: So that's 2006 to—

INTERVIEWEE: To 2011.

INTERVIEWER: '11. Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: Then I decided that I had had enough of managing human beings, so I got a job being which will be called the Toxics Coordinator from 2011 to 2013 for the two water bodies; the Puget Sound and for the Columbia River. So I worked as the point person on the work related to toxic chemicals in those two water bodies. Then finally, 2013 to the present until I quit, I was the cause of climate change point person; the, climate change coordinator advisor for EPA region 10.

INTERVIEWER: So you moved back to EPA in 2013.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I—

INTERVIEWER: Or was the other job, the 2011 to 2013, was that...

INTERVIEWEE: No, that was with EPA. I was in the City of Seattle from 2003 to 2006.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. So all these were after 2006 in EPA.

INTERVIEWEE: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Cool.

INTERVIEWEE: So anyway, so that's my sordid history.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Wow. Okay. So that gives me a lot to figure out where we go next.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. Well, that's why I should've started that I had a lot of jobs and if we were going to go that much detail in each one it could take a couple of days.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So we're going to have to figure out sort of how to manage this. Let me just say maybe the way to do it is by sort of just the presidential administrations that you worked for. It may be different. You may even qualify, like we do—and so the same questions, I mean I would like to hear more of when you moved in 1991 into working on this drinking water rule. Are you still in the same office? Where are you then?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I transferred in 1989. I transferred to; it's called The Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water. So on that one I worked in the main office, the office for the director there in the Office of Groundwater and Drinking Water on this specific project; on the lead and copper role for drinking water.

INTERVIEWER: So you're in that—was that a sort of AA person was the head of the office and you were—

INTERVIEWEE: It was the office director. In the Office of Water there were four or five offices and this office specifically was called the Office of Science and Technology.

INTERVIEWER: Within the Office of Water.

INTERVIEWEE: Correct, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, okay. I got it. So would you say now we are in the same administration; it was later Reagan, early Bush.

INTERVIEWEE: Bush, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you notice—in terms of the kinds of things we are talking about, in terms of—you're moving a little bit of the food chain, I guess, and so you are having more sort of contact with other parts of the agency, maybe outside the agency. What do you remember about how your sort of perspective changed as you moved into this new office in terms of contacts with other people, other groups, other?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, when I moved into this new job, because it was reporting, one, the rule itself was just a bit, was controversial. So it was pretty much more critical in the sense that there was much more interest from, let's say, interest groups; American Water, AWWA, American Water Works Association, AMWA, American Metropolitan, the whole—so a lot of the interest groups, trade associations were much more interested. So I had much more interaction with them in terms of listening, going to meetings, listening, taking their thoughts.

A lot more interaction with the office director in the Office of Science and Technology and the assistant administrator. I had to brief them a number of times and actually one time, it was William Reilly was the administrator, but we work more with Hank Habick, he was the deputy. I really didn't – never

worked with William Reilly, but briefed Hank Habick a number of times on the rule.

INTERVIEWER: So did you see – at this point what would you say about political influences that you saw?

INTERVIEWEE: You know what? I didn't really get a big sense that this one, they got. We were—The influence was very great in terms of asking us what we were doing and then disagreeing with that. I never got that sense and some of it and this is just a general—

<T: 30 min>

feeling that I can say; Bush I, that's when I look at it, I look at Bush I as kind of the old guard on the Republican environmental side of conservation, where environment and those issues were important to them and they valued them and they didn't question the need for these things.

I never got, if I remember right, never a feeling that we got any sort of pushback of what we were doing was the wrong thing. I didn't ever feel any of that personally. Maybe at the higher level there was, but what we came up with as a final recommendation to move forward with, nobody, as we moved up, tried to change that.

INTERVIEWER: You did say it was controversial in an earlier comment. So what did you mean by that?

INTERVIEWEE: Well it was controversial in that, I'll just do a quick one. In drinking water, most of the contaminants that we regulated, you could regulate at the treatment plan itself. The problem with lead is that the problem isn't that at the treatment plan, the water that leaves the treatment plant is lead-free or pretty much lead-free. The problem is that the water is corrosive; the lead is in the system itself.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: Many times, the lead is in places that is under the control of the homeowner. In other words, it's their house. So it was very challenging to figure out how to do drinking water regulation that required you to go into somebody's house basically, and do measurements to see the levels. So we ended up with all sorts of issues about, gosh, can you get into people's houses to do it. Whose responsibility is it for the lead in their houses? How do you measure it? It's just very complicated.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I can see. Yeah. Well, what about the, what about the kinds of scientists or sciences that you came into contact with in working here on this part of the agency, on this particular effort, that you hadn't had contact with before?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, I had much more contact with the Office of Research and Development. People doing work on not only the health effects from all of that, but also the treatment side. How do you install treatment that is going to remove lead? And on the legal side, our Office of General Counsel and on the enforcement side. So for me, it opened up kind of a whole range of

different parts of the agency that I hadn't seen before. I had to figure out how to navigate that because I was the regulation manager and I needed to figure out how to get all of these diverse folks agreeing that this is the direction that we should go.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: The positive thing is this is a final rule so they had already had a proposed rule. So that was already kind of the framework for it so my job was to shepherd it from proposal to final. So it wasn't like we were starting from scratch.

INTERVIEWER: So that was like you had all the hearings and comments and that kind of thing and had to sort of sort through all of that.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, had all the—exactly. Had the thousands and thousands of comments and they had to figure that out and how to balance those and answer those and modify things as the comments required.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Okay. So that gives me a pretty good idea of up until you leave your UNICEF job. Then you come back and you're working on Great Lakes quality and then on the National Drinking Water Standard for Disinfectants, it sounds like.

INTERVIEWEE: Right.

INTERVIEWER: So how did these various aspects of your job we've been talking about, how were they different in this time period?

INTERVIEWEE: In the time when I came back to the agency?

INTERVIEWER: When you came back, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, when I can back it was under the Clinton administration so we had Carol Browner. So I think while—and for me opened up another aspect because since this was a regional issue, a lot more involvement in the states around there and a lot more interest in politics in Michigan and Wisconsin and Illinois and all those that are lining the Great Lakes. So had to go out—again, there was a proposed rule so I was coming in just that the proposal was being done. So I did participate in going out to public hearings and getting input from people.

I was the guy who was spearheading all of the science side of it. So in other words, human health. What's the safe human health level? What's safe for fish? What's safe for wildlife? So I was coordinating all of that. Again, I had a lot of interactions with a guy named Bob Perciasepe who was the assistant administrator at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, okay.

INTERVIEWEE: Again, what directly out of the offices; Science and Technology Office, directly for them.

INTERVIEWER: So let's see; in terms of, it sounds like there was more sort of, you had to be more attentive to what was happening politically, especially in these states particularly with the Great Lakes initiative. Could you just tell me a little bit about how that – just give me a – do you have an example or something of how that played out in terms of state politics I guess you are saying?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, it was – yeah. There was also both the national and international because there is an agreement between Canada and the United States on that.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: So it had the international dynamic. I didn't – I was the technical guy so I was doing that. So the political side, I obviously didn't get as involved in, but if you looked at the states around there at the time, if I'm remembering rightly, it wasn't all blue states. It wasn't all democratic. There was some resistance from the industries in that area to send they can't, couldn't meet the standards that we were adopting. That's why we did a lot of outreach in going out and talking to groups and having meetings with the different parties to try to explain what we were doing. Meanings with interest groups, a number of them coming in whole spectrum to meet the assistant administrator and I would be involved in those.

I was a technical person. If issues came up I would try to answer it. So I was involved in the stuff with congressional folks other than being the guy that ever turn and go, "Mike, what do you think about that science issue?" So I had to make something up. I'm just kidding. I didn't make it up.

INTERVIEWER: You drew from your vast knowledge to answer.

INTERVIEWEE: There we go. Yeah. So for me, that is a whole different area that I hadn't really been involved with before. So for me was kind of fascinating.

INTERVIEWER: This was, each of these I guess, it looks like, are basically centered around particular processes of rulemaking. Is that correct?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, they were rulemakings so I learned a lot about the federal process for rulemakings.

INTERVIEWER: Did that seem in this period, to be changing at all or was a pretty much constant through. I mean, we're now we see the Bush I administration and now you're in the Clinton administration. So you watched a couple, at least, these unfold through the Clinton administration. Did you see any evolution and that rulemaking? How it happened?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. What I thought was interesting; you may remember Al Gore had the reinventing government.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah. Right.

INTERVIEWEE: What I think I saw was actually during that period, more attention paid to making sure the cost-benefit analyses were sound, more in terms of responding to people's comments, outreach. Just trying to be more responsive I guess to constituents' concerns. I think there even was a couple of other requirements that I'm not remembering now; the Paperwork Reduction Act or something like that. I think that came into being. That just made more work for us.

It seemed to me actually, during Clinton, that we had actually more process to go through. Then again, maybe that is where I was positioned in the organization and I was more responsible for that.

INTERVIEWER: So how can paperwork reduction initiatives cause more work?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, that's a good question. Well, the Paperwork Reduction Act, there was a couple of things that, if I'm remembering right; the Paper Reduction Act, at least if I remember what it was targeted –

<T: 40 min>

towards, was less work for, let's say the regulated industries. What it did seem to be, was it ended up being more work for us in terms of documenting our processes, documenting what we had. So more on the transparency side; they wanted us to be more transparent which is great, but more transparency sometimes requires a lot more documentation to be more transparent. So I started feeling a bit of that.

INTERVIEWER: So does it make, I mean, were they— had this been work that was done by industry before or was it just—or was it another sort of—another layer of paperwork that was just to make this more publicly accessible the industry had not been to?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, and I think a lot of it was just – I think that it was trying to – yeah, just make it more transparent so people, individuals, if they wanted to get information, they would be able to get information. Then you have access to that information. So I think that was just a general, that just wasn't particular to this rule. I think that was kind of the general feeling I remember having during the Clinton Administration is trying to make information easier to get to, to access.

INTERVIEWER: Do you see any of this as sort of the result of new political influences or as kind of separate from that kind of a change?

INTERVIEWEE: It's hard to say. I think it made it more just a, maybe even Al Gore's kind of intent at making government more functional, and one of the aspects of that is to make it more transparent and then accessible to people so they can get information. Also, as just a general sense, that the more I work in government, the more it – seems that trying to make, let's say, the toxic release inventory or other tools that are out there that help communities find information that can help them in terms of understanding what the risk might be to their community. So, I've seen that kind of evolution happening regardless of the administration.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What about – how would you describe the general atmosphere in your part of the agency over those years?

INTERVIEWEE: During that time I was there, I thought it was pretty positive. Again, the people I worked with were incredibly hard-working, incredibly dedicated. I think for those—when I was working on those projects it was very focus. We had a statute. We had legal deadlines. We had been sued so we had to get something done by certain amount of time.

That helped in terms of driving decisions and driving—moving forward. So sometimes, unfortunately, legal deadlines is, as we always joked, that's how we seemed to set priorities is when the court said we had to have something done.

INTERVIEWER: So there's a legal deadline for which of these now?

INTERVIEWEE: I think – I don't know. It was a while ago.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. I can probably look that up.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. I think for the Great Lakes Water Quality Initiative there was a legal deadline. Somebody had sued us and we had agreed to some paper we had to get it done by, but that's a little foggy in my mind. This disinfection byproducts rule, I don't think there was a deadline for that. I think it had just been lingering for a long time and people wanted to get going on it.

INTERVIEWER: How would you say the atmosphere in the Clinton years compared to that in the earlier Bush years?

INTERVIEWEE: I didn't get a real feeling. I guess if I look at William Reilly, I never got the sense that he was coming in to the agency to do anything other than trying to meet our mission which is to protect human health and the environment. I never got the feeling he was coming in to dismantle it or to completely restructure it. Of course, there were differences in philosophy I think, probably, in terms of how you do environmental regulations, but it was just a different feeling then—well, I guess we will get to the now where—

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah, the now kind of shadows everything I guess.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. So I never – I don't... I think also, two – two points. One, I never felt that he was trying to go against the mission and two, always felt, even though I didn't have any real interactions with him, that the administration, that they were very supportive of the staff. So those two things permeated again, to the Browner and even through Christie Todd Whitman era and the Bush II.¹ While Bush II, they probably did stuff that was maybe not in line. Some people were kind of grumpy about it. I don't think anybody felt, at least that I worked with, that this was somebody was trying to dismantle the agency. Christie Todd Whitman was a governor. She knew what she was doing and I don't think she came in with the ideological bent that EPA was evil and we had to get rid of it. Which I think is a little bit different than today.

INTERVIEWER: Then right now, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So let's do—you've already started on Bush II. So tell me about, you had somewhat different responsibilities. Did you? What was the reason? Well, let me just put this on the table. What was the reason then that you left in 2003 to go to Seattle for a couple of years?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. To me it was just an opportunity to work in local government. It was still here in Seattle and I always – I'd work to EPA for a long time and it seemed like kind of neat opportunity to go work in a very progressive city; an atmosphere that was just down the block from where I was. It was just

¹ Christie Todd Whitman was the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from 2001 to 2003.

something that I wanted to do. So to get that local experience, to see what's working in that environment, was like. So I wanted to do it.

INTERVIEWER: So it's not – it was more of a positive thing rather than a negative, "Oh, I'm leaving this workplace because it's not open for me."

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, it was totally positive. I liked what I was doing. I liked managing the people I was working with. This just seemed like an opportunity I didn't want to let go of.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So what about your move out to the regional office? What was driving that in terms of your thinking and decisions?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I was from Washington state originally and I had gone to school here. So I had wanted to get back here if I could. We had a one and a three-year-old at the time, my wife and I. So I thought if we're going to do this, we better do it now. So we did. Graciously, she quit her job and moved out here with not knowing anybody. So yeah, it was the right timing I think.

INTERVIEWER: So there was a lot of other things going on besides what was happening in the EPA office.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. No, I was having two young kids and traveling across the country and starting a new job and trying to get it situated. All that kind of stuff kind of overwhelmed everything else.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me then about—I mean, you've suggested this, but how? You are in a different position out there in region 10 as the Bush administration, the second Bush comes in. Are there ways in which any of these aspects of working in EPA changed for you? The political influence? Role of science?

INTERVIEWEE: No. You know what? This is again, my observation, is that during Bush II, they concentrated on a few areas like, let's say, climate change. They didn't want to deal with climate change and that's pretty clear that you couldn't talk about that. When I was doing drinking water in the region, I never—I almost felt that what they had done was to kind of say, "We got the folks in the region to deal with this. You guys do with this stuff." So I got the feeling, at least on my stuff; I think, on enforcement and some of the bigger things, the national EPA got more involved, but kind of on the level I was at, I didn't ever feel anybody told me one way or another what to do in the program I was managing. So I never felt that in the drinking water area. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So in the drinking water program out there, the regional one, what kinds of scientists and science were involved? That's kind of a different – when you get to the regional office, I imagine it looks kind of different because you are not writing the rules, your sort of doing the sort of more on-the-ground work. I guess you're looking at state plans. Is that right?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. The drinking water, what we do, we say, is we delegated the responsibility to the states to both implement and enforce except for—

<T: 50 min>

tribal lands where we still retain the authority for implementing and enforcing on tribal lands which is a whole another issue out here because we've got a lot of tribes. We have 256 of them. So that's a different issue.

A lot of our, the work, was oversight, but we did have a whole kind of range. In my group we had engineers, and they had some other—another—a couple of—two other health folks like me. Then we had a lot of number of generalists that were doing more of the oversight of enforcement, doing enforcement cases when the states didn't do it, and we also manage a lot of money. There is something called the State revolving fund and, while I was managing the group, was responsible for the oversight of the State revolving fund, the drinking water State revolving fund.

INTERVIEWER: Is that – that provides aid to the states to fulfill the standards?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, what it does is it provides money to the states and then they loan it out to drinking water and wastewater facilities, so it's an infrastructure program.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

INTERVIEWEE: It's called the revolving fund because people pay back in and in theory, that money, it starts to become revolving. It hasn't quite worked out that way, but that was the idea. So a lot of the drinking water and wastewater infrastructure that's done now and back then, was through the money that EPA provided.

So, I had to oversee that program and so I had two or three financial type of analysts who would look and then do audits. Not formal audits. They were going talk to them and look over the books to make sure what they were doing made sense and that kind of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have—I mean, it sounds like there might be more contact, direct contact, with industry and businesses, that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, yeah. My job, first of all, with the states, I worked very closely with the states; all the states. And I would go every year to all the different trade organization conferences and talk about what EPA was doing and get the shit beat out of me. That was part of my job, and I looked at it as developing those relationships was what I needed to do. So yeah, I had lots of interactions with both the states and with industry and with environmental groups too.

INTERVIEWER: And environmental groups too, yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: I guess mostly the, yeah, so they would all get involved. And your meeting with industry or with environmental groups, who was with a view to what you would do with the state—they are not implementation plans, but there is sort of the state plans for overseeing drinking water.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. Well, the trade associations wanted to know, first of all, what new regulations was EPA cooking up. They wanted to know that, and where the kind of status was and what direction EPA was going.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

INTERVIEWEE: So they wanted to know about that really, because those regulations had an impact on them or their members. So that's why they were interested in

listening to me; this spokesperson for EPA come and yack at them. The states, again, we were overseeing them so we, I would, every year, meet in person numerous times and work with them; try to set up metrics about how we're going to measure whether you are successful or not. Come up with some agreement on this is the metrics we are going to use to measure your success and work with them through that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So I guess what I want to do now is get into the Obama years and it looks like you've had three roles, EPA roles in those years.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: First of all; or before that, I didn't ask you about atmosphere in the Bush II era. You talked a little bit about that, but is there – are there things you would like to add just addressing directly the atmosphere question?

INTERVIEWEE: You know, I can't. I didn't see. An interesting statistic, and I've got to find it somewhere, is actually during... Oh, where's the thing I had? Which I thought was fascinating. It had a chart of employment and budget during the different administrations and the... Actually, during the Bush administration, we had more people than – oh, yeah. Here it is. If you have any interest, I thought this was – for me, it was kind of fascinating.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah. If you can send that along, I'm always interested to see that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. So I will just give you a quick example just to show it. During the Bush administration, the peak point was where we had about 17,700 employees at EPA and a budget of about \$8 billion dollars. When what's his name, Obama, left, we had 15,000 people and about the same amount of money.

So actually, during the Obama administration, the employee numbers dropped and the budget dropped where during the Bush administration, the budget kind of – the budget actually went up for a while and then it went down a little bit, but the number of employees stayed about the same. So anyway, that's just a, that doesn't get to your question about atmosphere, but I think it also is a foreshadowing of what we are going to talk about next on Trump.

INTERVIEWER: It kind of suggests something.

INTERVIEWEE: One thing I would say, with Obama that I found kind of fascinating was that, my feeling was that things became much more centralized. In other words, if you wanted to do anything or had an issue, it seemed like they wanted to control the message much more than let's say, the Bush of administration, which I thought was kind of interesting.

INTERVIEWER: So how did that particular change unfold for you? You were there... I guess you are working – let's see; I have you working – first couple of years you're in this research group. I don't remember what exactly you were researching.

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, yeah. I was managing a group of scientists who supported all the programs. So in other words, I would hire geologists and engineers and chemists and they would support the other programs within region 10.

INTERVIEWER: It was kind of like a science advisory group?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, it was an advisory group where we would provide the technical support to all the different programs.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

INTERVIEWEE: So I manage that group of scientist for, I don't know; four or five years.

INTERVIEWER: So how did that then work? The sort of more centralized approach in terms of what your group—what your managing meant for that group?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, for me, the group I was managing, because we were a support group to the programs, I didn't get as much involved in the day-to-day messaging and all that. My job was to make sure that my staff, my technical staff of about 25, were providing the technical support. To be honest, this is more just anecdotal and what I've observed and heard from people, that the messaging was much more centralized during the Obama administration. Personally, I was down in the weeds just trying to make sure people showed up to work and didn't kill each other.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: So I didn't see some of that stuff.

INTERVIEWER: So being in this research wing, as well is in the region, I guess that kind of insulated you from—

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. Yeah, it did.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any public sort of—I mean, did you go out and make press releases with that kind of thing? Just give me a sense of why working there you would not have the sort of—have to adjust concern by messaging.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. Well, the job that I had was – we have these different – we have the Air Program; we have the Water Program, Superfund program. So our job was literally to provide the technical support to those offices. They weren't looking to us to figure out how to message, or the policy, or any of that. We were providing the technical and scientific support to them to help them make the decisions. Of course, we would be a part of those decisions, but they weren't looking for us to make any judgments on policy and that kind of stuff. That was their job.

<T: 60 min>

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So that was, your interaction was within the agency with the various offices and they were the ones who did the sort of public interfacing and that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, they did. They would invite us on some topics. Our scientist would go to, the guys, the people I managed, would go to the meetings and be a part of those, and be on the technical side. I would go at times when there was big issues and controversy and people didn't want to go. They wanted somebody else to go take a beating. So, I would go on those and listen and provide input that I could. Again, it was more in a support role and not a lead role.

INTERVIEWER: So how; that see these... I have you being other two jobs as well, the toxic—dealing with toxics in the Puget Sound and then the climate job from 2013. Those are your other two jobs in the Obama administration.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did your angle on these kinds of issues, the sort of public interface, the role of—the way that you saw the role of science, the perspective from which is all that and agency, did they change when he moved to these other two positions?

INTERVIEWEE: The other – when I was a toxics coordinator I had a lot more—My job is really to go out, let's say on the Columbia River; was to go out and work with people outside in a whole range of organization, state, industry, to try to, first of all, have them come together to try to understand a little bit about what the problems were. Then try to work with them where I could. Try to see if there's a way to reduce some of their toxic pollution in terms, from a pollution prevention standpoint.

So I would connect people up with the industries and say, hey. It wasn't a regulatory. It was a nonregulatory capacity, but try to see if we can help the different industries, farmers, whatever they were, understand the problem and try to provide them with some resources that they could do something about it.

INTERVIEWER: Did that – where there any sort of political controversies involved?

INTERVIEWEE: There wasn't too much. We did report, it was called the state of the river report for the Columbia River that, I don't know if it was political. We had quite a media splash about it. That was at the end of the Bush era. We tried the best we could to summarize the current situation in the Columbia River in terms of toxics. I don't know if it was controversial. I think some people questioned the science that we did there but. But, generally not – it wasn't that controversial again, because it was more of a voluntary kind of outreach, what would help you type of thing. In my experience, when that is the case, one, people will, are much more willing to listen and work with you, especially if you have some resources; magic. So I wasn't coming in as a regulator. I think that has a lot, is a big difference.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a two there that...? I thought you, okay. Never mind. Okay. So what about the move into climate work? Could you tell me how that was for you and then what it says about Obama administration I know was more sort of focused on building policies and responding to the climate issue. So how do you see your own sort of advent in that work is fitting into larger initiatives across the administration?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. There are two levels in that. One, as you just said, the Obama administration, that was one of his legacies that he wanted to go out with. That, I think he did. I could go into the details of why that's the case. At the regional level, my boss, the regional administrator, Dennis McLaren, he was a very big advocate for climate change. So I always felt supported to kind of go out, do what you need to do, to both internally, that was my first mandate; to work internally within the region to help people figure out how they consider and integrate climate into their work. So for example, let's say you

have a Superfund site, and that they are looking at design, and they're hoping that design lasts 70, 80 years or into the future, I would go to them and say, "Have you thought about what might happen if the sea level rises?" Or, "Have you thought about if there is a heavier precipitation event? Have you thought about that?"

So I would work them to try to walk through the what if and then see if they might be able to modify any sort of design so they could consider climate change. Then, on the outside, I would work along with other federal agencies and tribes to try to again, provide information to them and help them think through, some go well, okay. How do we include climate change when we are thinking about adaptation? You know the adaptation side of it?"

Because in climate, the mitigation side to reducing the greenhouse gas, at that was more kind essentially run from DC. The clean power plan, the fuel standard, the car standards, all those kinds of stuff were more from DC. So I didn't get too involved in that because there really wasn't much I could add to that. I got more on, how are we going to adapt to this change in climate, side of it.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's an interesting observation, that there would be that difference between in the regions versus in the headquarters on climate.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. It just was because the—but in the region, we did have a number of programs that you might not call climate, but they are energy efficiency and water conservation and materials, how you reduce your materials. So there's a lot of things we didn't call climate, but in fact, that's what they were doing. They were reducing greenhouse gases and that's mitigation.

So I worked with the folks in the regions on those kind – but those are much more small-scale, working business by business type of a thing. Not kind of the global regulations of power plants and cars and buildings and agriculture and that kind of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: The kinds of things you were doing, where they controversial? Did you run into any conflicts or that kind of thing as you went along?

INTERVIEWEE: No, it wasn't – it was just a matter of again, trying to figure out how to navigate. Where we are out here, Washington state, Western, and Washington and Oregon are the more liberal. As you get over to the Eastern, more conservative; Idaho conservative, Alaska conservative. So what I had to learn is how to talk to the farmers, for example. Or how to talk to the people that are doing forestry. So you just had to learn to talk their language.

In other words, if you're talking to a farmer, talk to them about water. What are you seeing? Because they are living on the land, they get it. Just, "Gosh. We have less water in the summer, more in the winter. What are we going to do about this?" So you start talking that language and all of a sudden they're going, "Yeah, I have been seeing these changes. Gosh. What can we do about it?" So I've learned that it was very important to talk to the people where they are at. So you don't get into, is climate change happening or not. You don't want to do that debate because it just doesn't get you anywhere.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, interesting. Well, how would you say that the atmosphere. I guess now I want to move quickly before too long into the next, the last part of the

interview. Atmosphere; in terms of you are working there and the regional office, the Obama administration is still in there, who are now working on climate. Have you noticed any changes in the sort of general atmosphere within your part of the agency, or is it pretty much steady state?

INTERVIEWEE: It's pretty much steady state. Although, because of the budget reconciliation on all of those things, we lost a couple of thousand. EPA but a couple of thousand people during that time. For example, region 10, we had about – I think when Obama came in, maybe 600 people and then by the time he left we were below 500.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. That's a lot. That did make a difference.

INTERVIEWEE: Wild people were happy with the policies, the attrition, it made the work a lot harder because the work wasn't getting less, but we were getting less people. So I don't think it was the policies necessarily, but it was the work situation became really challenging because of the cuts that were a part of Obama just trying to balance all the other factors he was doing.

<T: 70 min>

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. People left, that hundred people or plus people and the regional office, they left because of attrition or were they fired or let go?

INTERVIEWEE: No. No, it was a combination. If you look at the federal workforce, and EPA is included in there; I can't remember. It some phenomenal number like 40 percent of all federal workers are eligible to retire now or something like that. The reason that is, at least I can speak for EPA, is that we didn't hire people for a long time. So what we had was just kind of a bubble. Then, they actually had buyouts. Was it last year or the year before? So people could retire early and a number of them did. So we lost a number of people, but to attrition and buyouts and just because we could hire because we had caps on the number of people we could hire because of the budget issues.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Let's see; well, I want to get now into, for the last 20 minutes or so or more if you want, about, let me just ask these questions about your own best achievements and most frustrating experiences. Then we can get into the transition, recent transition.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure. So what was the first one?

INTERVIEWER: What do you feel are some of your best achievements of your work at the agency and why?

INTERVIEWEE: I think over in DC it was the couple; the lead copper rule and the Great Lakes Water Quality Initiative. Those two were a lot of work, learned a lot, and I think they had national implications. So those two, I'm kind of the most proud of for my DC days.

I think in terms of working in the region, probably because I managed for a good portion of that time I was there, I was just proud of the – of working with people and make sure they were successful. Kind of what I view a manager supposed to do to make them successful. I feel proud. I think I did that for a number of people.

And then I think on the last one, on the climate change that I feel that I did make a difference in the four years in terms of increasing awareness of climate and actually sitting down with people and helping them understand what that meant, where they were at, for their particular site other than just kind of general; it's getting warmer, there's going to be more precipitation, but to actually work with them one-on-one. It's a slow process. So those are the couple of things I feel most good about.

Then the final one is the mentoring. I ended up mentoring a number of people and I thought that was, for me that was very rewarding.

INTERVIEWER: What about your most frustrating experiences and why?

INTERVIEWEE: The frustrating things, these are things that I shouldn't say, but when I was a manager, a very frustrating thing, or maybe it is the only thing I probably agree with the Republicans on; is that we have to figure out a way to reward people and to get rid of people. I understand why that's controversial, but we just have to figure out a better way in the federal government to do that because we do have people that shouldn't be there. We should've been able to get rid of them. I tried a number of times and the process just wears you down. So that would be one. We got to figure out a way to do that.

On the other hand, we've got to figure a way to reward people that are really doing phenomenal work. We really don't have very good incentive programs to do that right now I don't think. So that was a frustrating part that I saw it the bureaucracy sometimes got in our way.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Are there any changes? We like to ask this more positive question also. What changes do you think would improve the agency; make it healthier, or more fully functioning? From your long experience, are there any things that you would sort of pluck out as, say the pendulum swings back, as I know it will sometimes, and people want to fix the agency and make it better than it was. What would you point to?

INTERVIEWEE: I always look at it as—of course you can go on a grand scale, but I look at the individual. What makes individuals want to stay in an organization and be in that organization and thrive? To me, there is a couple of things. One, I think right now we just don't have it very much, especially scientists. Scientists want to get, keep involved in their discipline. They want to go to their national meetings. They want to be able to have an opportunity to go and increase their knowledge of certain areas. Right now, we just don't have that. I think if I could do anything, not just scientists, but everybody, needs that kind of a training I think and opportunity. Right now, we just don't have it which is unfortunate.

The second thing and I go back to it, I just think nothing kills morale more than having people that aren't doing anything, and you can't do anything about it. So I think we've got to figure out a way—that it's fair and equitable and all of that, but we got to figure out a way to do that.

The third thing is, and we are getting a little better about this, but EPA is not a very diverse place. It's a challenge I know to do that, but I think we would benefit from having a more diverse workforce; to have different voices that we

might not have now in the workforce at EPA. I think we really need to work on that. So those are my couple of things.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Great.

INTERVIEWEE: Okay. So now, tell me a little bit about what you have seen about the transition. I think I will start with if you, I mean, I seem in the regional office you didn't have much contact with the transition or beachhead teams. Am I wrong about that?

INTERVIEWEE: No, you're completely right. No, I don't know if anybody had much contact with those guys. Anyway, that's just—

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Yeah. So what have you seen then of the transition from your angle? I could point out other sort of events that you might have followed or had some contact with, but, let me just see if, in terms of asking that general question, if, what you did see? Anything you would single out as sort of a signal of the change happening? Any particular events or memos or whatever?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I mean, I can go on the—there's a number of areas here. Let me just go over a few of them that I've seen. One, I think you can—you have to look at the point—who was appointed a EPA. Well, it was Scott Pruitt. I think that sent us a pretty strong signal that we were going to have a guy who, as you know, I'm just repeating; 13, 14 times he sued the EPA. I'm not convinced he really believes in what we're doing.

So you appoint somebody, but that's just not where it stops. He appointed – his Chief of Staff worked for Senator Inhofe who is one of the most ferocious critics of EPA, and one of the biggest climate deniers. Not only his Chief of Staff, but multiple other staff. So the signal to EPA staff; the top management of EPA is now run by people that have, who have tried to dismantle EPA. They've tried to demoralize EPA. So that sends a pretty bad picture. So that's the first one.

Second I think is the proposed budget. We all realize that Congress isn't going to adopt that budget, but when your bosses— Scott Pruitt and President Trump, propose 25, 30 percent staff cuts—they propose to eliminate 50 some odd programs, again, it doesn't send a message to staff that they are valued, that the work that we have done is very good.

Third, there is no logic to it. The budget document that came out that we all read was like one or two sentences of why they are cutting programs like climate research. Well, they're cutting it because it's not in line with the priorities of the president. So that I think really set people off.

I'll just talk and do one more and then stop. There's two more. The one I think that's really put people over the edge for me; when President Trump came to EPA to rescind the Obama era climate—

<T: 80 min>

policies. Everybody knew that was going to happen, but to come to EPA, and then on the day that we, that he was coming, they had sent a, Chief of Staff or Pruitt, sent out an email. The headline was "Our Big Day Today" implying

that "our" is EPA staff and golly, we've got the president coming to dismantle the biggest environmental challenge that we all think of as climate change. We should be happy. I think that is that just put people, including me, kind of over the edge going, "Oh, my goodness. Who are these people?"

So, yeah. Those are just three examples of things that I think have triggered and gave signals to staff that this is not normal. This is not business as usual.

INTERVIEWER: Can I ask you; did you watch his speech or the ceremony? I understand it was on when Trump came to the EPA. I understand it was on closed-circuit TV. Did you guys have that beaming in out there in the regional office?

INTERVIEWEE: You could get it, yes. We had two events. First one Scott Pruitt—he talked to all of EPA when he was first confirmed. He did that all of EPA. Then this one, you could access that if you wanted to view it. I did not, but I know a number of people that did.

INTERVIEWER: So what did they report? Do you remember the sort of secondhand stories they told about—

INTERVIEWEE: Just kind of the—One, if you looked up there again – this is probably getting too political, but there was, there in the stage, for one, was all white guys. All white guys. I think, for some people, they were kind of going, "Golly, that's kind of odd." More importantly, not more importantly, but also on President Trump, Trump talked about the promise of getting these jobs back to the coal miners. I think that really bother people because, as I call it, you're giving false hope to these folks and it's just cynical, especially given the market forces that are going out there, the decline in the coal jobs over time.

Finally, the other policies that Trump is putting in place to open up more drilling, more fracking. So economics 101, the demand for electricity is kind of stabilize. We're going to boost the supply of fuel. Golly, what's going to happen? The price of natural gas is going to go down further and the price of electricity is going to go down further. Coal just isn't going to be there. I empathize with the miners, we can do something for them, but it was just cynical.

INTERVIEWER: Did you watch the Pruitt speech?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. I watched a number of the Pruitt speeches, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really. Okay. Just in terms of the one, that one where he first came to the EPA, do you have any particular recollection and impression of that talk?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. We were all in the room. Of course, it was in D.C. and we were in Seattle. All I can say is there was pretty much in silence, people shaking their heads, people kind of just walking out going, "Oh, my goodness. This is really happening." So I think there was, yeah, there wasn't—it wasn't joyful I guess, if I could just say that.

INTERVIEWER: How did you find out about the proposed budget? Did you see it in the newspaper or did they send out an internal email?

INTERVIEWEE: No. No, it was a leaked document. Somebody leaked it, so of course, you leak it and then it starts getting out and then of course I got a copy of it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get a—I mean, I don't know if you are... Did you get the first one they put on the Washington Post? They finally got the leak and just made it public on their website.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Is that how you—

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. That's how I—somebody sent it to me from there and said, "Hey, here's the document." I didn't get the leak internally, the EPA, it was somebody from the outside.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So how would you describe the change of atmosphere now? I know you've left and I read your letter which is great and very articulate in terms of what you think what's been going on and so forth. Do you have anything to add to that about the overall atmosphere that you have seen since January, and your part of EPA?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. You know what? I think people were hopeful. They were hopeful that the rhetoric that we had heard on the campaign trail wouldn't translate into actual policies, but I think people now are feeling that that's not true. I think again, Congress will come in and not all the budget cuts that he's doing and policies that he's putting forward are going to happen. I think people were hoping and right now I think people are just kind of doing their jobs; not sure, there's still a lot of uncertainty; hoping that it doesn't end up as bad as it appears that it might.

But you know what really – this is what really bothered me the most was I remember a number of younger folks, younger folks meaning they had started within six months or year at EPA before the election. After the election they came in and they—these are scientists. These are PhD scientists. These were the best and the brightest young kids. I can say young because they are the age of my kids. I can call them young. I think that's okay.

They were going, "Mike, did I make a mistake here? I thought I was coming to an agency that I was going to be able to use my knowledge that I worked so hard to get, to come, and help advance protecting public health and the environment." They are going, "Did I make a mistake?" So I talked to them about it. That was what really does that really hit me kind of going, wow. Here's our new cup of people that we are relying on and they are wondering, "Did I make a mistake?" So they had a big impact on me because that's just not a good way to move into the future.

INTERVIEWER: Could you walk me through your process by which you finally decided to call it quits and to leave?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, you know I—

INTERVIEWER: And then to write that letter also. Just give me a sense of your story there in terms of how you got there.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. The story was I had planned on retiring when I was 60 and that was in February. So contrary to some of the things in the press, I didn't resign in anger. I was angry, but I retired. So I was going to retire anyway. In terms of the letter, I had written, I had just decided that I was writing down some of my thoughts over the last few months. Then, as I just said, let's put them all in

one place, so I did. I said, well, what I don't send this one I'm leaving and just send it to administrator Pruitt and a few other people, Tom Benton and Doug Erickson who were from the Northwest, and then send it to the region, EPA Region 10 staff before I left. That's where we from there.

INTERVIEWER: So how many people did you send it to in total in the initial send?

INTERVIEWEE: Geez. It was just EPA; 600 people in EPA.

INTERVIEWER: In the regional office?

INTERVIEWEE: Regional office, yeah. I send it to a couple other people in other EPA regions and headquarters that I had worked with over time; in a much smaller number, but people I just considered friends and colleagues. So yeah, probably 600 EPA people and that's—I pushed the button and that was it. I didn't send it to anybody outside EPA, and walked out.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get feedback from folks within – the agency folks or?

INTERVIEWEE: When I was writing it or after?

INTERVIEWER: Well, yeah. When you were writing it, but also afterword. Yeah, both.

INTERVIEWEE: No, when I was writing it I didn't want to have any footprint of anybody else. It was just me. So I didn't ask anybody else, but of course, I am there and listening and after working a place for almost 30 years, you kind of get a sense of the culture. So no, but the feedback I've gotten since then has been positive. People thanked me for voicing what they can't, or what they feel they can't. So it's been generally positive, young.

INTERVIEWER: Has anybody gotten on you about that? Do you mind me asking?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, no. That's fine. No. To be honest, I have never done this kind of public thing before so that's, at least with this kind of thing. So when the "Washington Post" article came out, I started reading some of the comments and I read through a couple and said, "I'm not going to do this." They were just horrible. There were just some horrible personal attacks.

<T: 90 min>

My son wrote and he said, "Congratulations dad. You made it. You're getting pillaged personally on these things." So that was the last time I read any of the comments. I said this isn't worth it. I'm not going to, so, yeah. People tell me there is some pretty nasty stuff out there, but nobody has called. Nobody has sent a nasty email to my private email. So that's good.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get in touch with the Washington Post reporter? Did they approach you?

INTERVIEWEE: They got in touch—Ted got in touch with me. What you send it out that many people—

INTERVIEWER: Somebody sent it along to him somehow. Is that?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, he contacted me. Somehow he got me and then I said, "Well, sure. I will share that..."

He had gotten a letter and then he said, "Well, would you want to talk to me?" So that's kind of how it started.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Hold on. I've got somebody at the door. I have to tell them just a minute.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure. [...]

INTERVIEWER: Let's see; okay. So in terms of, let me see. Before you left, did you notice any changes in how you were part of the agency was communicating or dealing with others? Either with others outside the agency or with the headquarters?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, it was a lockdown so to speak. Anything. Any meetings or outside conferences or even meetings we were having, unless they were kind of regular business, we had to pass it through our people, up in our, media person who then had to pass it to headquarters to get approval to do it. Oh, no, the communication was quite gridlocked.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So I remember the story in the newspaper was, the first couple of days there was this lockdown, but then it supposedly eased up, but that's not true with where you were.

INTERVIEWEE: When I left you still had to go and get approval to, not for everything. If it was a normal meeting with the state that you did, that wasn't a big deal. For example, I did two workshops before I left. One was at, with water, drinking water, and wastewater utilities, trying to help them understand how they can prepare for climate change. One was something, we have a Superfund site out here called Lower Duwamish and it was a similar thing. I had to get approval from headquarters to do those.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: Which normally, of course, you wouldn't, but because, climate change was a part of that—well, it wasn't even that. It wasn't just climate change. You had to do it for any type of meeting like that. They did say yes, so.

INTERVIEWER: Have you seen any evidence of data being removed or made less accessible?

INTERVIEWEE: No. No, I haven't. I haven't seen that, no.

INTERVIEWER: What about the digital interfaces? That kind of thing? Websites? I'm not sure how much your region does of that.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. That's more a headquarters thing. I just went on the EPA thing today looking for some information. At least on climate, it looks like most of the stuff is still there. Maybe there's some nuances I didn't get, but it looked like it was still there.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What about – have you yourself and reading blogs, articles, or other materials from critics who work in or worked for the agency question what have you see much of that, and if so, how effective do you think it's been in conveying what you think is important?

INTERVIEWEE: You mean critics of the new administration?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: To be honest, I'm not sure how, not sure these guys listen to anybody. I really don't know people asked me all the time, "Do you think administrator Pruitt

read your letter?" I would probably say, no, I don't think he ever did. In his mind, these kind of issues, I would – I don't know the guy, so I don't want to impugn his integrity because I don't know him, but I just can't imagine these kinds of conversation would have much impact.

INTERVIEWER: You yourself, have you been reading, seen this kind of thing out there? Have you been actively looking for this kind of criticism or seeing?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. You know, I think that's one reason why I guess my letter caught on because there weren't that many people openly who had been in the agency in the media's eyes criticizing.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: A lot of them are anonymous. There are sites, the EPA – secret websites where people are yacking on, but those are just private websites that people are venting on.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see any evidence of disagreement within the agency before you left about these directions? Any public sort of engagement with the way that things were going and that kind of thing?

INTERVIEWEE: No, not really just because it was kind of early. I know there was a couple situations where I heard that the new administration was thinking of taking it a little bit of different tact, but I don't think any final decisions that I know of had taken place that I'm aware of. That doesn't mean there hadn't or that there might not, but there is definitely a feeling that, yeah, before we could do anything, we needed to run this up to the headquarters so they could make sure that – they were doing an enforcement action, that enforcement action. At least they were aware of that. So some of that was there.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I wanted to make sure that you got in touch with this group, the Environmental Protection Network. Do you know about them?

INTERVIEWEE: I do not, no.

INTERVIEWER: Well, they are a group of former EPA employees and they are trying to get something together to begin to defend the agency and that kind of thing. So I can put you in touch with them if you want.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah, that would be great. Yeah, I'm not aware of that and that would be great.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. They're just trying to organize. They really working on a volunteer basis at this point, but they could really use your help I think.

INTERVIEWEE: Sure. That would be great.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Okay. I will do that. Anybody else, does well, okay. What, of the work you were doing at the agency, do you think is most vulnerable to the budget cuts and other things that these guys are doing now?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, I would say these last four years it was climate change. So the work that I was doing, they are not going to, I don't think; they probably won't replace me and my job I can't imagine. So I think that's going to go away. So that would be the biggest thing. And just climate change in general I think. The work that we, the EPA has done, on the climate; the Clean Power Plan and standards for methane emissions and standards for cars. They are talking about rolling

back the auto standard, tailpipe standards, things like that. That will have a huge impact on the work people do.

INTERVIEWER: What about the drinking water stuff? Do you think that's going to...?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I don't – I think, to be honest, a lot of the work there, especially is an infrastructure. So I think probably what will happen is that, if I was reading the tea leaves, this is what I would think would happen is that the infrastructure work would stay there or be increased because the states are so vocal that they want that money. So I'm guessing that's in line with some of the presidents promises about infrastructure. So my guess, some of that will stay, I would guess.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What about anybody else that you would recommend I talk with.

INTERVIEWEE: Well, yeah, I had a couple of other folks that were... I asked them if they would be interested. A couple were.

INTERVIEWER: Cool.

INTERVIEWEE: I can send you... Them your way if you would like to.

INTERVIEWER: That would be great. Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: And there are two guys I work with. I think they actually started maybe in Carter, but they have been retired for a while, a couple of years. So they don't have the immediate stuff that that's okay, but they definitely have a long history at EPA.

INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Yeah.

INTERVIEWEE: So if you don't mind, I can just introduce you to email.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds good.

INTERVIEWEE: Then you can take it from there.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So I will send you then – I will send you this consent form and then you could just respond to that. You already have by email anyway. Okay. Well, I appreciate you taking the time to talk at length about all of these... All you've done and to reflect a little bit on the current dilemma and situation. It's been very helpful.

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah. Well, good luck and I will be curious to read what you come up with.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, hopefully we will have that 100 days report out, not in short order, but fairly soon.

<T: 100 min>

INTERVIEWEE: Okay. That would be great. Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: Thanks a lot.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]