

Trump EPA transition team member visits campus

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Morgan Brownell /THE REVIEW

David Stevenson had an influential role in developing policies set for the Environmental Protection Agency under the transition from the Obama to the Trump administration.

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"We are not trying to kill anyone," David Stevenson joked Wednesday at the College Republicans meeting. The group invited Stevenson, who worked on President Trump's EPA transition team, to speak at their weekly meeting in Willard Hall. Students from both sides of the political aisle attended, and heard Stevenson reflect on working with the new administration.

Stevenson was an successful entrepreneur and executive at the DuPont company for 23 years. At the Caesar Rodney Institute, Stevenson serves as the director of the Center of Energy and Competitiveness, a role he has held for the last six years. Although he admits that he has no experience working with the government, he said joined the transition team to "make a difference." However, under a confidentiality agreement, Stevenson is not allowed to talk about any plans before they are made public.

Founded in 2008, the Caesar Rodney Institute is a think tank dedicated to Delawareans' concerns surrounding economics and individual freedom. According to the website, the institute stands as "a non-partisan organization."

Stevenson was put on the EPA transition team, which was comprised of ten people. He compared his team experience to his "college days."

"We were having a good time making a difference," Stevenson said. "That was the most fabulous thing about being there. You want to do things to change the world and that is exactly what it felt like being on the transition team."

The opportunity to be on the transition team, while completely voluntary, required an "extensive" vetting process for the candidates. Volunteers sent in resumes and had to be approved by the team leader, in addition to the White House landing team. Once transition

team members were selected, the 300 chosen individuals were split into 30 teams, each dedicated every department and agency in the federal government.

Stevenson added that while the transition team arrived later than usual, time did not prohibit the team from making huge overhauls. Prior to proposing changes, the team was subject to a series of briefings from the EPA, each explaining their mission or goals. Reflecting on the experience dissecting the EPA and experience with policymaking, Stevenson said.

"We got to ask questions," he said. "We tried to be polite and it worked, almost all the time."

After the briefings, the team drafted a series of "detailed" action plans, agency directives and executive orders; a "first" for any administration according to Stevenson.

Given the power to influence policies within the EPA, Stevenson wants to change the "overreach" the organization has, hoping to reduce regulation while "also maintaining environmental quality."

A self-proclaimed promoter of air quality, Stevenson blamed the previous Obama administration for spending too much time on regulation, preventing any improvement of air quality. Citing statistics from the Caesar Rodney Institute, he claimed.

Another issue Stevenson hoped to tackle as a transition team member was the issue of the climate research published and endorsed by the EPA. Citing issues of bias within science advisory boards and peer reviewed research, Stevenson called it "mad science." Stevenson believes the methodology of climate change science allows the EPA to justify unnecessary regulations.

"If you do not get the same output for everybody, the science does not count," he said. "The basis of scientific method is that you have to have something reproducible data to get the same result."

Meteorology and climatology students Marisa Karpinski and Margaret Orr were less than pleased with Stevenson's opinion.

Karpinski, who is a senior, questioned Stevenson's statistics which she said reminded her of climate research sponsored by oil industry lobbyists, a practice that "angers me to the core."

Orr, who does not identify herself as Republican, said she attended the event to get both sides of the story, and was interested to hear from someone involved in the process.

As a witness to the rapidly changing EPA under the Trump administration, Orr is concerned for the years to come.

"My adviser compares it to being like Cassandra from Greek mythology who is given the gift of prophecy, with the curse of no one believing her," Orr said. "Although we will be the first to admit the process of climate research not perfect, science is not political and peer review is the process that makes it credible."

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