

# Los Angeles Times

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## **Trump's pick as EPA air pollution chief won't pledge to maintain California's authority**

**By: Evan Halper, October 4, 2017**

When California defied Washington a decade ago by launching aggressive action on climate change, one official at the Environmental Protection Agency emerged as a nemesis for state leaders time and again.

William Wehrum’s efforts to keep California from going its own way so enraged power brokers in the state that they ultimately used their clout in the Senate to block his confirmation for the job as director of the EPA’s air and radiation division, one of the most influential environmental posts in government.

Now, Wehrum is back. He has been chosen by President Trump to run the same office the Senate refused to give him during the Bush administration. And in the current GOP-controlled Congress, California lacks the power to block him.

State leaders are anxious about Wehrum’s appointment at a time the EPA has threatened to revoke California’s authority to impose vehicle mileage standards that are tougher than those imposed by the federal government. Those standards, which California is empowered to enforce through a waiver granted by Congress, are a key pillar of the state’s climate action. The law enables other states to adopt the California standards, and more than a dozen have.

Wehrum in 2006 worked aggressively to block California from using the waiver — against the advice of career staff at the EPA, who found the agency had no basis for doing so. Wehrum also led broader efforts at the EPA to deny greenhouse gas emissions are a pollutant under the Clean Air Act. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled they are.

At Wehrum’s confirmation hearing Wednesday, California Sen. Kamala Harris sought an assurance from him that he will not revive his efforts to block California from using its waiver. She did not get it.

“Will you commit, if confirmed, to follow the science and law ... and recognize California’s authority to issue its own new vehicle standards?” Harris said, after rebuking Wehrum for disregarding the findings of career staff the last time he was faced with that decision.

“My commitment to you,” Wehrum responded, “would be to understand that provision as much as possible and to implement it as faithfully as possible.”

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