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Trump 2.0 went where Trump 1.0 wouldn't on climate

So what changed between President Donald Trump's first and second terms? A lot.



BY: **ROBIN BRAVENDER** | 07/31/2025 01:42 PM EDT



President Donald Trump waves as he boards Air Force One on Tuesday at Royal Air Force Lossiemouth en route to Washington. | Jacquelyn Martin/AP

GREENWIRE | Longtime haters of government climate rules are celebrating this week.

After working for more than a decade to unravel EPA's so-called endangerment finding, their dreams are on their way to coming true. After the first Trump administration

declined to tackle the Obama-era determination that underpins government climate regulations, Trump 2.0 this week proposed axing the finding.

“It's a great day for America,” Myron Ebell, who led Trump’s EPA transition team in 2016, said in an interview this week.

Ebell is among the conservatives who hoped to see the first Trump administration topple the 2009 determination that greenhouse gases pose a threat to public health and welfare, a finding that triggered EPA rules to clamp down on emissions.

The first Trump administration was divided internally about how to approach the endangerment finding, and the push to revoke the determination ultimately fizzled. It’s a massive shift from Trump 2.0, when the president targeted the finding in [an executive order](#) issued on his first day in office.

So what changed between Trump’s first and second terms? A lot.

Changes to the makeup of the Supreme Court and several high-profile rulings about agencies’ authority have backers of repealing the finding more optimistic about their chances. The second Trump administration has a new cast of officials in senior energy and environmental roles. And the Trump team had four years out of office to take a step back and craft its second-term plan.

The Trump administration points to major changes in the legal landscape since the Obama team released its 2009 finding.

That includes “major Supreme Court decisions in the intervening years, including *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, *West Virginia v. EPA*, *Michigan v. EPA*, and *Utility Air Regulatory Group v. EPA*,” an EPA spokesperson said Thursday in an email.

Those cases “have significantly clarified the scope of EPA’s authority” under the Clean Air Act, the spokesperson said. “The decisions emphasized that major policy determinations must be made by Congress, not by administrative agencies.”

The swift movement to upend the finding is a contrast to Trump’s first term, where “there was a debate in the administration whether to do it,” Ebell said.

David Schnare, who was on the EPA transition team and “beachhead” team of early political appointees, was among those pushing the first Trump administration to be [aggressive on unraveling the endangerment finding](#).

“I think it’s time that it happened,” Schnare said of this week’s announcement. He pointed to the looming 2026 congressional midterm elections. Trump wants to get “everything he can done in the first two years,” Schnare said. “He learned that lesson.”

Schnare was disappointed that Trump's first-term team wasn't more aggressive in upending the endangerment finding.

Trump's first EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt, [wanted a "red-team, blue-team" public debate](#) aimed at challenging the prevailing scientific consensus about humans' impact on climate change. Critics of the endangerment finding hoped that exercise would lead to toppling the finding.

Pruitt's [effort to launch a climate science debate languished](#) as the EPA boss became entangled in a series of ethics and spending controversies. Pruitt resigned less than halfway into Trump's first term.

His successor as EPA administrator, Andrew Wheeler, [said in 2018](#) as he took the reins at EPA that he believed the endangerment finding was "settled law" and there "would have to be a major, compelling reason to try to ever reopen that."

There was "an appetite" in the first Trump term to revoke the endangerment finding, but "the immediate agenda" was reconsidering and halting Obama-era climate rules, said a first-term Trump EPA official who was granted anonymity to discuss internal agency operations.

"That was a big challenge," that person said, and "an endangerment finding review was not a first-six-months priority."

The White House during Trump's first term wasn't interested in Pruitt's public science debate "not because the White House accepted the endangerment finding or the science," said that former EPA official. "They did not trust that particular idea would work."

Groups that were disappointed that the determination survived the first Trump term "lobbied to ensure the endangerment finding was an early and principal priority" when Trump took the White House for the second time, said that former EPA official.

Current EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, it appears, has fully embraced the mission. He announced the reconsideration in March, saying he had "been told the endangerment finding is considered the Holy Grail of the climate change religion" and that he intended to strictly interpret the Constitution and the law.

"Just like President Trump, Zeldin is aggressively and quickly implementing the America First agenda — by ensuring that businesses and everyday Americans are free from burdensome, environmental regulations imposed by the Obama and Biden administrations," White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers said Thursday in an email.

"President Trump is proud of all the work Administrator Zeldin has accomplished to unleash American energy, expedite the permitting process, and rollback overreaching

climate policies,” she said.

Jeff Clark, another longtime critic of the endangerment finding, is now leading the White House regulatory review office. Clark, who served at the Justice Department during Trump’s first term, was among Trump’s first-term officials who were “much more open to the idea of reconsidering the endangerment finding,” Ebell said.

Clark, who was an attorney at a law firm at the time, said [during a 2013 panel discussion](#) that he believed the endangerment finding was “flawed from its inception.”

The Trump team had several years after the president’s first term in office to think about and discuss the best way to revoke the endangerment finding, Ebell said.

Ebell, who wants EPA cuts deep enough that they’ll be tough to rebuild by the next administration, thinks it’s important to revoke not just climate rules but to also dissolve the endangerment finding that triggers them.

“Whether it's Obama regulating greenhouse gas emissions, or Trump lifting them, or Biden putting them back on or Trump lifting them, the threat is still there,” he said.

“So if the endangered finding is withdrawn, a future administration will have to go through all the work of doing it again,” Ebell said. “And I think we're in a much better place with the courts now ... so it will be much harder to actually accomplish the endangerment finding.”

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BY HANNAH NORTHEY



YOUR ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Kyler Rowzee

Customer Engagement Specialist
krowzee@politico.com

Ashley Koo

Account Manager, Growth
akoo@politico.com