

This is the second of three posts assessing the first two years of the Trump Administration. We all seem to be subscribed to the “All Trump News, All the Time” newsfeed. It may be helpful to step back a bit and compare Trump with his last Republican predecessor, George W. Bush.

How do the two stack up? Bush and Trump were very different in character and style, but their regulatory aims were similar. Bush and Trump were both trying to steer the country in the same directions in terms of regulatory policy: increased use of fossil fuels, less environmental regulation. But the Republican Party has been radicalized since Bush’s day, and in environmental affairs, the Trump Administration reflects that radicalization. For instance, whereas Bush actually created important ocean national monuments (though it was a bit out of character for him), Trump has made major reductions to existing national monuments (which was completely in character for him.) One way of explaining the difference is to say that the Bush Administration was skeptical of regulation whereas the Trump Administration is fiercely hostile.

Even where the two took similar policy positions, Trump’s actions have been more radical because the status quo has changed. Bush was primarily engaged in before-the-fact foot-dragging, while Trump is engaged in after-the-fact rollbacks. It’s much more drastic to knock down a new building than to refuse to allow its construction beforehand. Similarly, destroying environmental programs is a bigger deal than resisting their creation. It is one thing to resist allowing the EPA to regulate greenhouse gases in the first place; it’s another to try to eliminate existing regulations.

Here are a half-dozen specific areas.

1. **Budget Cuts.** Both Bush and Trump proposed EPA budget cuts. But Bush’s proposed cuts were in the 5-7% range, whereas Trump proposed 25-30% in his first two budgets. Fortunately, Congress has resisted Trump’s potentially devastating budget cuts.
2. **Climate Agreements.** Bush repudiated the Kyoto Protocol, in part because it imposed no obligations on India and China, while Trump repudiated the Paris Agreement (which did include commitments from those countries). It was unlikely that the Senate would have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, but the Paris Agreement did not need Senate approval.
3. **Domestic Climate Policy.** Bush did his best to prevent EPA from regulating greenhouse gases, first refusing to do so and then, after the Supreme Court ruled against him, stalling on taking any action. Trump has attempted to rollback existing climate regulations adopted under Obama. Bush’s EPA refused to grant California a waiver to allow the state to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from cars, while Trump

is trying to take away an existing waiver. On the other hand, Bush did encourage voluntary efforts by corporations to cut CO₂, and he did favor increased research on low-carbon technologies.

4. **Air pollution.** Both EPA and Trump view current air pollution standards as too costly for industry. Bush proposed replacing them with cap-and-trade schemes. Trump is attempting to undermine the basis for the standards by excluding scientific evidence of harm. Both have sought to weaken existing rules so that power plants can make major changes without subjecting themselves to the rigorous standards applying to “new or modified” facilities. Trump has also attempted to weaken regulations of air pollutants by requiring EPA to ignore the way that reducing one harmful pollutant can have the effect of reducing another one.
5. **Water pollution.** Trump wants to eliminate an existing regulatory defining the scope of federal jurisdiction and limit jurisdiction only to a subset of rivers or lakes and to wetlands directly adjoining them. The Bush Administration also issued a proposed rule under which, according to the [NRDC](#), “60 percent of our nation’s streams and 20 percent of our wetlands would lose federal protection.” But the proposal was withdrawn when 39 states protested, along with a number of GOP House members. Trump is moving forward with a draconian version of the Bush proposal.
6. **Energy.** Under the leadership of Dick Cheney, the Bush Administration adopted an energy plan seeking to expand the production and use of fossil fuels. The Trump Administration has pursued the same goal but with somewhat more drastic means, including a proposed subsidy to coal plants based on their supposed importance to national security and drastically cutting the size of existing national monuments to allow oil and gas production.

To sum all this up, you could view Bush as a “kinder and gentler” version of Trump in the environmental area. Or to flip the comparison, you could say that Trump has “militarized” Bush’s anti-environmental policies.

Next up: The prognosis for the next two years.