

Trump's picks for office provide a strong hint of what next year will look like. In Trump's first term, government actions were often overturned by the courts. Agencies made basic mistakes: skipping mandatory procedural steps, ignoring important evidence, or failing to address opposing arguments. Many people thought he had learned his lesson and pick competent, experienced administrators this time. They were mostly wrong. Some of his choices like RFK Jr. and Tulsi Gabbard are spectacularly unqualified - in fact, their selection seems to reject the whole idea that expertise and experience should matter.

Trump's EPA pick isn't as bad as these others. Unlike Trump's first-term EPA choices, Leo Zeldin is neither a rabid enemy of environmental protection nor a paid lobbyist for fossil fuels. On the other hand, he has less experience than the first term appointees, who themselves lacked the regulatory experience of many of their predecessors. Scott Pruitt had litigated major environmental cases, and Wheeler was familiar with swathes of environmental law from his work as a coal lobbyist. Zeldin's environmental background is limited to issues relating to Long Island Sound. Overall, he seems likely to act as a conduit for White House dictates rather than playing any independent role, and he will be poorly positioned to exercise quality control over agency actions.

Trump's choice for Interior Secretary and energy czar, Doug Burgum, has been a successful governor. While devoted to fossil fuels, he also seems open to renewables. Chris Wright,, the pick for Energy Secretary, is a fracking company executive and as devoted to fossil fuels as you might expect. This could lead to slowdowns on the renewable-energy grants and loans the Department controls . It seems unlikely that any of them will offer any resistance to Trump's desires.

Trump's dictates, from everything we know at this point, will be almost unremittingly anti-environmental. Trump's first term was an all-out assault on climate regulations and on limits on fossil fuels, and he has promised much the same this time. As some of his outlandish picks for other agencies indicates, Trump continues to view agencies as infested with worthless programs and civil servants dedicated to undermining the country. He has promised to reinstate Schedule F as a means of purging the civil service of dissidents and frightening the rest into towing the party line.

Trump has also threatened to grab power at the expense of Congress by illegally impounding funds to slash programs he opposes. His demand that the Senate recess so that he can make all his appointments without their participation further confirms his unwillingness to submit to checks and balances. The recent struggle to avoid a government shutdown indicates that Trump will have difficulty mustering congressional support for his more extreme demands. That means that he will be even more prone to unilateral

presidential action.

This all adds up to a tremendous capacity for destruction. But it is based in part on a confidence that it is no longer necessary to follow the law because courts will bow to Trump's will. I know that some people may view this as naïve, but I don't think the courts will cave to Trump. During the first Trump Administration, the government lost scores of cases. In the aftermath of the 2020 elections, judges peremptorily rejected lawsuits filed to overturn the last election, including judges that Trump himself appointed.

Trump's strategy involves appointing inexperienced administrators and to alienate or eliminate the experienced public servants who could help them implement their policies effectively. In the environmental area, we can expect a wave of hyper-aggressive administrative actions from the Trump Administration: rollbacks of dozens of current regulations, efforts to weaken the federal bureaucracy, and elimination of barriers to fossil fuel production and use. The good news is that Trump has not learned the lessons of his first administration and continues to think that ideology and bravado can substitute for competence. The courts are likely to tell him otherwise.

None of this is a certainty. What *is* certain is that we are moving into an era of even greater chaos than the Trump's first administration, and that there will be battles over his actions at every turn. In short, 2025 will not be fun but it will definitely be interest.