2020 was a tumultuous year. Hopefully, 2021 will be balmier. Widespread use of vaccines will hopefully tame the COVID-19 pandemic, and maybe the political world will settle down a bit too. Here are nine key things to watch for in terms of environmental policy.

1. **The Georgia runoff elections.** Currently, the Republicans look likely to control the Senate. But two seats are still in play, due to runoff elections in Georgia tomorrow. If Democrats manage to take those seats, the Democrats will have Senate control, which will make life much easier for Biden. (Given the roles that Susan Collins and Joe Manchin would then play as swing voters, however, this would likely result only in incremental progress on energy and environment.) Even winning one of the seats by the Democrats would make it easier for them to succeed by joining with just one GOP moderate.
2. **Executive actions.** In less than three weeks, Joe Biden will take office as the 46th President. He clearly won't have the kind of strong majority in Congress that Democrats were hoping for. We should see almost from the start some aggressive use of executive powers to advance policy, beginning with a return to the Paris Agreement.
3. **Biden appointments.** Biden's appointments will give an indication of how aggressively he plans to pursue environmental protection. We'll also get a sense of how obstructive Mitch McConnell and his caucus will be, as we see their reactions to Biden's appointments.
4. **Agency priorities.** Agencies will be kept very busy repealing Trump's rollbacks and trying to replace them with strong environmental regulations. This will be a time-consuming process. The Administration will want to start early on the most important regulatory actions, so we should get a sense of Biden's priorities early on.
5. **The economic recovery.** Economists think the economy will need another stimulus package. Whether that can happen depends on the Senate more than anything else. If the Senate does get on board, the next question will be whether the Democrats can get funding for clean energy as part of the package. Another important question about the recovery will be the trajectory of the oil and gas industry. Will it regain its financial health, or will long-term worries about its viability keep the industry in the doldrums? A related question: Will business travel and commuting be reduced below pre-COVID levels as people have become accustomed to using tools like Zoom.
6. **The 6-3 Court.** The Court will wind up its current term by the start of July — its first since the appointment of Amy Coney Barrett made Brett Kavanaugh

the swing Justice. We should start to get a sense of how far and how fast the Court will shift to the right. That will be an important consideration for EPA and other agencies in crafting environmental regulations.

7. **Climate science.** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will produce its sixth assessment of climate science, which will come out in installments from April to November. (The synthesis of the report, which involves jockeying between governments, won't come out until next year.) The IPCC assessment is as close as we have to a definitive statement of our knowledge of present and future climate trends and their impacts, methods of cutting carbon emissions and their cost and effectiveness, and ways of adapting to the changing climate. The report should clarify the state of the science on key questions like how fast the planet is warming, how much sea level will rise, what technologies for reducing climate change are the most promising, and how we can try to live with those changes that we're unable to prevent.
8. **The next round of climate negotiations.** The next UN negotiating session (the 26th Conference of the Parties) will take place at the beginning of November. Looks for Biden to try for a major step forward in the negotiations.
9. **China.** Speaking of international matters, China looms large as always. Last year, China announced a very aggressive plan to curb and ultimately reverse its emissions growth. In 2021, we should start to see how serious the government is about implementing the plan. Also, Biden will undoubtedly want to cooperate with China on climate change, but we will have to see how well he will be able do so given the other tensions between the two countries.

I thought about an addition to the list like "10. Something completely unexpected." But I guess no one needs to be reminded of that right now.