

If there is a single thing for environmentalists to be thankful for this year, it is simply this: the virulently anti-environmental Donald Trump is no longer in the White House.

My Thanksgiving post last year began, “Nearly four years into the Trump Administration, we’re now accustomed to waking up every morning to learn about a new attack on the environment.” Five years ago, in the aftermath of the 2016 election, the picture seemed even worse: “These are dark days for the cause of environmental protection, and it would be easy to give way to despair.”

In the ten months since Trump left the White House, we have forgotten just how bad things were. Our environmental law center has compiled a [list](#) of 200 environmental rollbacks during the Trump Administration. There were previous presidents who sought environmental rollbacks and favored the fossil fuel industry. But there were none so unremittingly hostile to environmental protection in all forms.

While disasters are taking place, they preoccupy our thoughts and dominate our emotions. In the aftermath, we do our best to put them behind us and move on. Think of the 1918-1919 flu pandemic, which was three times worse than COVID in terms of deaths per capita in America. The equivalent of its toll today would be 2 million deaths. It barely gets a mention in history books. Similarly, less than a year after Trump left office, our memories have faded.

Once they have taken place, events take on an air of inevitability. But there was nothing inevitable about the election outcome in 2020. Keep in mind that 47% of the electorate—over 74 million Americans — voted for Trump. Trump was not all that far out of touch with his party on environmental issues. Consider the party’s leadership in Congress: Kevin McCarthy, in the House, has a lifetime environmental voting [score](#) of 3%. Senator Mitch McConnell’s lifetime [score](#) is barely better at 8%. Their party nearly won control of both Houses in 2020. If not for Trump’s bungling of COVID, we might well now be facing a federal government under complete Republican control.

In short, environmentalists should be very, very thankful that Trump is no longer in the White House. But being thankful doesn’t mean being complacent about the risks the future may hold.