

Tomorrow is the thirtieth anniversary of the Contract with America. On September 27, 1994, more than 300 Republican congressional candidates stood outside the Capitol to sign the Contract. In retrospect, this was an important step toward the divisive politics of the Trump era. The Contract was a list of promises about what Republicans would do if they won the House. A key plank tied deregulation and tax breaks for business to worker welfare. After they took control of the House, the GOP followed up with a series of attacks on environmental protection. Both in substance and style, it presaged the Trump era.

The [Contract with America](#) was the brainchild of Newt Gingrich. It was a turning point in American politics: moving the GOP from compromise to confrontation, nationalizing what had previously been locally oriented House races, and shifting the GOP further to the right. In the words of a [later journalist](#), Gingrich “turned partisan battles into bloodsport, wrecked Congress, and paved the way for Trump’s rise.”

In terms of deregulation, the Contract called for a new law embodying risk assessment/cost-benefit analysis, strengthening the Regulatory Flexibility Act and unfunded mandate reform, all of which was supposed to create jobs and raise worker wages. It also called for cuts in domestic spending and for compensation whenever regulation reduced the value of land. The Contract inaugurated a new [era](#) of anti-environmentalism, culminating in Trump. The House GOP Whip, Tom Delay, said that “EPA, the Gestapo of government, pure and simply has been one of the major clawholds that the government has maintained on the backs of our constituents.” Besides efforts to prune back many environmental laws, the House also tried to [eliminate](#) a third of EPA’s budget.

That brings us to the present-day. As it happens, Trump also tried to cut a third of EPA’s budget. And the [GOP Platform](#) drafted by him and his supporters echoes the pledges made thirty years earlier: “Republicans will slash Regulations that stifle Jobs, Freedom, Innovation and make everything more expensive. We will implement Transparency and Common Sense in rulemaking.” The platform also calls for an end to “market-distorting restrictions on Oil, Natural Gas, and Coal” to “make America Energy Independent, and then Energy Dominant.”

In case anyone found that language too subtle, the Platform proclaims in ALLCAPS that Republicans will “CANCEL THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE MANDATE AND CUT COSTLY AND BURDENSOME REGULATION” and “END THE WEAPONIZATION OF GOVERNMENT AGAINST THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.”

Gingrich’s version may have been a bit more literate, but the continuity is unmistakable.

