

“We are driving a dagger through the heart of climate-change religion and ushering in America’s Golden Age,” or so said EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, who used to be considered a fairly rational person. This is known as drinking the Kool-Aid, and it’s something that usually ends badly.

Specifically, Zeldin said EPA would reconsider (and presumably revoke) its finding that greenhouse gases “may endanger human health or welfare.” This is actually a position that many skeptics about climate action have moved away from, arguing instead that trying to reduce emissions is either futile or harmful. That puts them in a position analogous to anti-vaxxers like RFK Jr. who say much the same thing about vaccines. Zeldin’s position is more akin to a claim that vaccines aren’t needed because diseases like diphtheria and whooping cough don’t exist or are perfectly harmless.

I know you’re heard this before, but the scientific evidence about the reality of climate change, its causes, and its harms is incredibly well-established. It’s based on many different types of data and models, which have been tested and retested. And scientists haven’t ignored the arguments made by climate deniers — they’ve tested and rejected each of them.

Of course, inside the rightwing bubble, all kinds of wild assertions can be made, and critics can be conveniently ignored. Administrative law requires a lot more than brave posturing. Courts require reasoned decisions based on all the evidence in the record and responses to significant criticisms of an agency’s view. Zeldin can no more supply those than he can refute the law of gravity. (“But, helium balloons!”). I’ll bet they called him Zany Zeldin when he was younger. What the courts call this is “arbitrary and capricious.”

It’s not even clear what retracting the endangerment finding would accomplish even if it was successful. Doing so would indirectly increase the risk that utilities and oil companies would be liable to damages for climate change. One of the main defenses to those lawsuits is EPA’s ability to regulate greenhouse gases. If EPA withdrew from regulating CO<sub>2</sub>, it might also lose the power to oversee California’s regulations of CO<sub>2</sub> from trucks and cars. And the next Democratic Administration would simply reverse direction and reinstate the waiver.

To hear Zeldin talk, the effects of eliminating the endangerment finding would be downright miraculous. It would eliminate trillions of dollars in regulatory costs, lower the cost of living, “reignite American manufacturing,” spread benefits to

communities, and launch “America’s resurgence.” And, equally likely, cure the lame and bring sight to the blind. I’m a little surprised that he didn’t claim it would bring on the Rapture and send us all to heaven.

Honestly, this is just plain embarrassing. And the rest of the world will justifiably view it as one more sign that the U.S. has taken leave of its senses. Trump can change the name of a water body on maps, but he can’t change scientific reality.