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While many of us prepared to celebrate Independence Day last week, a group of employees from the Environmental Protection Agency were bravely speaking out about what they see as their boss “recklessly undermining the EPA mission” of protecting human health and the environment.

In a now-infamous letter sent to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, hundreds of current and former employees outlined five main concerns about the agency’s direction (undermining public trust, ignoring scientific consensus to benefit polluters, etc.) and expressed interest in working with him, along with members of Congress, to “restore EPA’s credibility as a premier scientific institution.”

Instead, about 140 of these federal employees were placed on administrative leave just before the Fourth of July holiday, for a 10-day period — the maximum amount of leave for such an investigation — and are waiting anxiously to hear what the administration is going to do to them.

“I think it was intended to scare people, and it had its intended impact for sure,” said Bethany Dreyfus. She’s President of AFGE Local 1236, one of the unions that represent workers in EPA Region 9 (California and 4 other Western states) and EPA’s

National Center for Radiation Field Operations. “I think the intention of the administration is to scare people into not exercising their First Amendment right,” she told me. Her Local 1236 signed the letter as a group and so did individual employees. Dreyfus said that 15 bargaining members from Region 9 were placed on administrative leave — “one of the highest numbers” by region after the Chicago office.



EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin (Photo: EPA / Flickr)

Of the hundreds of EPA employees nationwide who signed the letter (on their own personal computers reportedly, and not during work time), many signed their names, while others signed anonymously for fear of retaliation. Because of the grassroots nature of the campaign, the letter was still circulating when the suspensions came down. Many more employees might have signed on, Dreyfus believes. “I think it speaks for many more people than who signed on,” she said. Their “declaration of dissent” was posted to the website of Stand Up for Science, which has organized demonstrations against the various attacks on science funding. They stopped counting at 620 signatories and removed all of the names. Union leaders who signed were not placed on administrative leave.

This week, Stand Up for Science held a press conference with members of Congress who oppose the dramatic deregulation at EPA and support the employees. “They’re doing it because they care about our environment and our wellbeing,” said Rep. April McClain Delaney of Maryland.

Virginia Congressman Don Beyer said the 139 employees are profiles in courage. “It is incredibly disappointing that this administration has done what small people do, which is run and hide, tell them to shut up, fire them, get rid of their jobs,” he said. “I love that they’re now known as The EPA 139. I’m hoping that that will become a new meme for what it means to stand up for what’s right… like the Magnificent Seven”

I’m impressed that the treatment of EPA employees has stayed in the headlines despite the flood of other news this week. I think it’s a story that resonates with people because it’s such an obvious attempt to silence workers — potential whistleblowers — who are taking a big risk to speak up because they want to do their job: keep asbestos, lead, and mercury out of our bodies.

It also comes after months of attempts to dramatically reorganize, refocus, and downsize the federal workforce at many of the agencies that keep us safe through inspections, enforcement actions, and emergency response. In the last 6 months, the EPA contributed to a Herculean effort to clean up the debris from the January fires in record time because it was an all-hands-on-deck situation. If you don’t have the people power, you can’t respond that quickly to the next emergency, Dreyfus noted. Already, hundreds of EPA employees around the country have retired early or been forced out, not to mention the many more pink slips that could be on the way.

Thanks to a US Supreme Court decision on Tuesday, the Trump administration can move ahead, for now, with layoff plans for hundreds of thousands of federal workers. Mass layoffs from federal agencies like the EPA will have a huge impact on

climate and environmental policy. “I think this reduction in staff is going to have echoes for years to come,” Dreyfus said.

It is not just current and former EPA employees who are feeling discouraged. It’s future ones too. Consider the story of Emma Rose Shore, a UCLA Law student and summer law fellow at the Emmett Institute.

Last October, she got great news. She was accepted into a summer internship program in Washington D.C. at the EPA, where she hopes to work one day in civil service as an environmental lawyer. Then came the November election. Months went by and she was starting to prepare for the summer program but didn’t hear and didn’t hear and finally had to assume that something was wrong. She got an email from EPA leadership on the day her dream internship was supposed to begin, letting her know that this program to mentor young lawyers is on “indefinite hiatus.”

“I remain hopeful that at some point the tide will turn and we as a country will once again recognize the value of a nonpartisan, expert civil service,” Shore writes in an account of this experience at Legal Planet.

On that hopeful note, welcome to The Drain…

Texas Flood and Extreme Weather



Coverage of the Texas flood disaster continues to dominate the headlines and, as always, some outlets are doing a good job of drawing the climate connection and others are not.

As you know, heavier than normal rains over the weekend — 12 inches an hour, at times — pushed the Guadalupe River in Texas' Hill Country to near-record heights — causing the deluge. More than 160 are missing and more than 100 are reported dead, including two dozen children and counselors from Camp Mystic. It is not too soon to be explaining that storms like this are becoming more intense as a result of climate change. Some reporters like **Arcelia Martin** at Inside Climate News drew the climate connection by the second graph, writing that climate scientists said the torrential downpours on July 4 exemplify the devastating outcomes of weather intensified by a warming atmosphere.

Attribution science has progressed rapidly, but it will take some time to study the Texas flood, according to scientists on a webinar panel held this week by Climate Central. That's because it's relatively hard to get hourly rainfall data (as opposed to daily records) that might be necessary to suss out the climate change signal, said

Friederike Otto, a World Weather Attribution climate scientist. “It doesn’t mean there’s no connection, it’s that there isn’t a specific attribution study yet on this event, but we do know a hallmark of climate change is that a warmer atmosphere can hold more water vapor, moisture,” said **Bernadette Woods Placky**. However, one rapid attribution report by ClimaMeter has already claimed the storm was intensified by climate change.

Making the connection is important because this is when Americans are paying attention. We know that nearly three-fourths of Americans think that global warming is affecting extreme heat and that number is 72% when it comes specifically to wildfires, 72% for droughts, and 71% for flooding, according to a new poll by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

As in other natural disasters, some right-wing lawmakers and candidates are making wildly untrue claims that the floods were the result of geo-engineering or weather modification, like cloud seeding catastrophic weather events. Rolling Stone covers the conspiracy theories around the Texas floods.

Other coverage has focused on policy and federal cuts. NPR’s **Michel Martin** looks at recently failed state legislation that would have enhanced emergency response measures in Texas and talks with the Association of State Floodplain Managers, about the kind of support the federal government has stopped offering those in flood-prone areas, including by cancelling the BRIC grant program under FEMA.

Speaking of extreme heat, new UCLA research published in the journal Nature Geoscience finds that not only will climate change make heat waves hotter and longer, but the lengthening of heat waves will accelerate with each additional fraction of a degree of warming.

Good timing for Grist to launch Disaster 101, which it calls “your guide to extreme weather preparation, relief, and recovery.” **Lyndsey Gilpin** spearheaded the various guides and articles.

A week before the Texas flood, Inside Climate News interviewed a local emergency manager in Illinois about what it’s like to handle extreme weather events at a time when FEMA and climate science have been undercut in Washington.

All the more fitting that this week, Sen. **Sheldon Whitehouse** gave what’s billed as

his 300th “time to wake up” speech on the floor of the Senate, a rollicking takedown of dark money, fossil fuel polluters, and Republicans who have let them “burrow into government.” **Elizabeth Kolbert** at the New Yorker reflects on Whitehouse’s decade of wake-up calls regarding government inaction to address the climate crisis. “We’ve now entered the era of consequences of our climate negligence,” Whitehouse told her.

Trump Signed One Damn Dirty Deal



I have to admit I was wrong when I wrote in 2023 that repealing the Inflation Reduction Act was politically impossible because it was “a candy shop” for corporations and red states hungry for manufacturing jobs who would fight any repeal effort. Lesson learned.

Trump, enabled by nearly every Republican in Congress, has managed to erase virtually all of Joe Biden’s landmark climate bill — while also butchering Obamacare, removing Americans from health coverage programs. Which is why **Dan McCarthy** at Canary Media calls it “a law not of creation but of destruction.” Republicans

passed the so-called “One Big Beautiful Bill” with a vote of 218-214 last Thursday. President Trump signed it. The only good thing about that is we no longer have to use that moniker for a law that hurts America, kills jobs, helps China, and sets the world back on climate goals.

“It’s like a candy store for oil and gas executives in particular.” That’s how my UCLA colleague **Cara Horowitz** described it when she talked with KCRW’s Press Play with **Madeleine Brand** about how the bill, now law, would set back climate goals, clean energy developers, consumers, EV buyers, and homeowners in all sorts of ways.

One provision kills the penalties related to the longstanding Corporate Average Fuel Economy program. NHTSA must still put out fuel economy standards — but without any obligation to comply, the CAFE program is effectively a “zombie,” Politico’s **Alex Guillen** reports with quotes from my colleague **Ann Carlson**. “We will see compliance drop dramatically, Carlson predicts.

All of this dismantling of climate policy means that the US will add an extra 7 billion tons of emissions to the atmosphere “from now until 2030, compared to meeting its former climate pledge under the Paris Agreement,” according to an analysis by Carbon Brief.

As the New York Times’ **Lisa Friedman** reported, “scientists are warning the result would increase the likelihood that the Earth will heat up by an average of 3 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of this century.” Her NYT colleagues have launched a new series called “Power Moves” about China’s drive to win the clean energy race as the US gives up. The head of a Chinese auto group tells the Wall Street Journal that the Republican tax bill will give China a big leg up in the global market.

On Monday, the White House followed up with an executive order that directs the Treasury Department to issue “new and revised guidance” to try to prevent wind and solar projects from receiving the remaining tax credits unless a “substantial portion” of a project has been built within a year. **Jael Holzman** and **Katie Brigham** at Heatmap News report that leaving some of the tax credits was a sticking point in the megabill negotiations. **Clare Fieseler** at Canary reports on two fully approved offshore wind farms that could still be tanked by the tax bill.

Federal programs helping us all buy a heat pump, EV, or solar panels are about to end. **Tik Root** at Grist wrote an explainer on how to tap them before they

disappear.

Just about the only silver lining is that the forced sale of public lands that I wrote about last month did not make the final text. The fallout from this tax and spending bill is a big story from now until 2028.

More Bad News

It's already looking like we'll see a gnarly wildfire season in California. More than a dozen fires began sparking across Riverside and San Bernardino counties last week, and the Madre Fire raged across 80,000 acres through parts of San Luis Obispo, including parts of Cuyama Valley and the Carrizo Plain.

This at a time when the Trump administration has weakened the Forest Service and other federal agencies that play important roles in California's ability to fight, and prevent, fires. National Guard forces that would otherwise be available to fight fires have been deployed to LA to instead help with immigration raids.

Trump has also decided to defund the Mauna Loa Observatory, a facility that has dutifully recorded CO2 data since the 1950s when scientist Charles Keeling chose Hawaii's Mauna Loa volcano for the site of a new atmospheric measuring station. Read about it at The Conversation and at Legal Planet.

What's worse is that for the first time ever, the monthly average of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere exceeded 430 parts per million this May, reported NOAA scientists at Mauna Loa Observatory and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego.

The Energy Department under Trump has reportedly hired at least three scientists who are well-known for their rather unscientific rejection of the overwhelming consensus on human-caused climate change. The New York Times reports that this is part of an effort to recruit scientists to help them repeal the 2009 "endangerment finding."

6 Months After LA's Fires



Gov. Newsom and local officials held a press conference in Altadena on Monday to mark the 6-month anniversary of the January firestorm, and to celebrate what he called the quickest fire clean-up effort in the state's history, saying that 9,195 of the 9,873 properties enrolled in the federal government's debris removal program have been cleared.

While the federal government has paid for direct response costs and debris clearance, it has not moved on the $40 billion or so long-term disaster recovery aid that California has requested — nor that for other states like North Carolina.

LA County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath introduced a motion last week aimed at accelerating and strengthening the region's recovery and rebuilding efforts through a Rebuilding Authority. That authority is one of the major policy recommendations of a Blue Ribbon Commission supported by UCLA researchers. There's a bill called **SB 549** by State Senator Ben Allen that would authorize the creation of a Resilient Rebuilding Authority for the Los Angeles Wildfires. It has a hearing on July 16.

I spoke to my UCLA colleague **Julia Stein** about how such a rebuilding authority would work as part of this Legal Planet feature on lessons LA learned while

recovering from the Woolsey Fire.

Lawsuits stemming from the January fires against Edison International and LADWP could be worth tens of billions of dollars in claims so investment banks, hedge funds and debt investors are vying for contracts to fund the litigation, reports Bloomberg Law.

Nicole Lambrou, an LA-based designer, architect, and urbanist, wrote about how to rebuild a community (not just structures) for Zocalo Public Square.

CEQA and Other California Stories

The California Environmental Quality Act rarely makes national headlines, but it did this month thanks to the budget trailer bills (AB 130 and SB 131) Gov. Newsom signed to bring sweeping changes to California's landmark environmental law, using the language of "abundance" in the governor's own press release. The trailer bills included elements of 5 or more previous bills including SB 607 (Wiener) and AB 609 (Wicks) who were guests on the Volts podcast with **Dave Roberts**. Reason magazine praised both those lawmakers and Newsom. Many environmental organizations are outraged. A new exemption for "advanced manufacturing" facilities in areas zoned for industrial use — including plants that build semiconductors and nanotech — drew some of the fiercest criticism for obvious environmental justice concerns, CalMatters reports.

Further exemptions from CEQA are being floated as one response to Trump's tax and spending bill as a way to ensure that clean energy projects keep getting built in California, **Alex Nieves** reports for Politico. A Politico analysis conducted last month as the megabill was taking shape "found 794 projects nationwide — including 60 in California — that had not started construction and risk losing crucial tax breaks."

Alejandra Reyes-Velarde at CalMatters has a story on California's authority over cars, trucks and pollution hot spots. My colleagues **Mary Nichols** and **Brennon Mendez** talk about what the state can do next, including a look at the power of indirect source rules. What about the other states that follow California's path-blazing emissions rules? Inside Climate News has a roundup on what states like Oregon, Washington, New York, and New Jersey are doing.

California's version of Make Polluters Pay legislation — two Climate Superfund bills — have again stalled in Sacramento amid fierce lobbying and industry pressure. The

Western States Petroleum Assn. and the California Chamber of Commerce reported spending about $3.5 million and $1.2 million, respectively, on lobbying this quarter, reports **Hayley Smith** for LAT. Backers of the bills are hosting biweekly grassroots organizing meetings to continue building momentum at the local level for next year.

Albany in Northern California is ahead of the pack when it comes to organizing a neighborhood-scale decarbonization project, as **Twilight Greenaway** reports for Inside Climate News and Canary Media. But with SB 1221 coming online for 30 pilot projects around the state, organizers are starting to look for prospects and there are some deadlines coming up this month.

In a move that could greatly impact California, the country of Malaysia is banning plastic waste imports from the U.S. as of this month, because of America's failure to abide by the Basel Convention treaty on international waste transfers, **Susanne Rust** reports for LAT.

Energy Etc.

NEPA changes are kicking in quickly: Federal agencies including the Departments of Energy, Interior and Agriculture are all starting to "issue new permitting rules that trim back or eliminate procedures that have been in place for decades," Bloomberg Law reports.

A new Energy Department report warns of a 100% increase in blackouts if the US closes coal and gas plants. The report "lays the statistical groundwork to continue its efforts to keep coal and natural gas plants open beyond their scheduled shutdown dates," Axios says.

A fifth of U.S. counties now restrict renewables development, according to a data analysis by Heatmap Pro.

A self-made solar billionaire named Dean Solon is forging on with a new U.S. manufacturing business, despite the tariff uncertainty and recent loss of tax credits, writes **Julian Spector** for Canary Media. Solon's new firm, Create Energy, "will sell developers solar modules, trackers, batteries, inverters, power stations, and other auxiliary equipment."

Louisiana lawmakers have reclassified planet-warming fossil gas, so-called natural

gas, as “green energy” in a move that allows gas projects to compete with solar and wind energy developments for clean energy funding. Grist reports that similar bills passed in Ohio, Tennessee, and Indiana.

Elisa Morgera, the UN special rapporteur on human rights and climate change has a new report to the general assembly that argues that the US, UK, Canada, Australia and other wealthy fossil fuel nations “are legally obliged under international law to fully phase out oil, gas and coal by 2030 – and compensate communities for harms caused,” reports the Guardian.

Courts & Climate Litigation

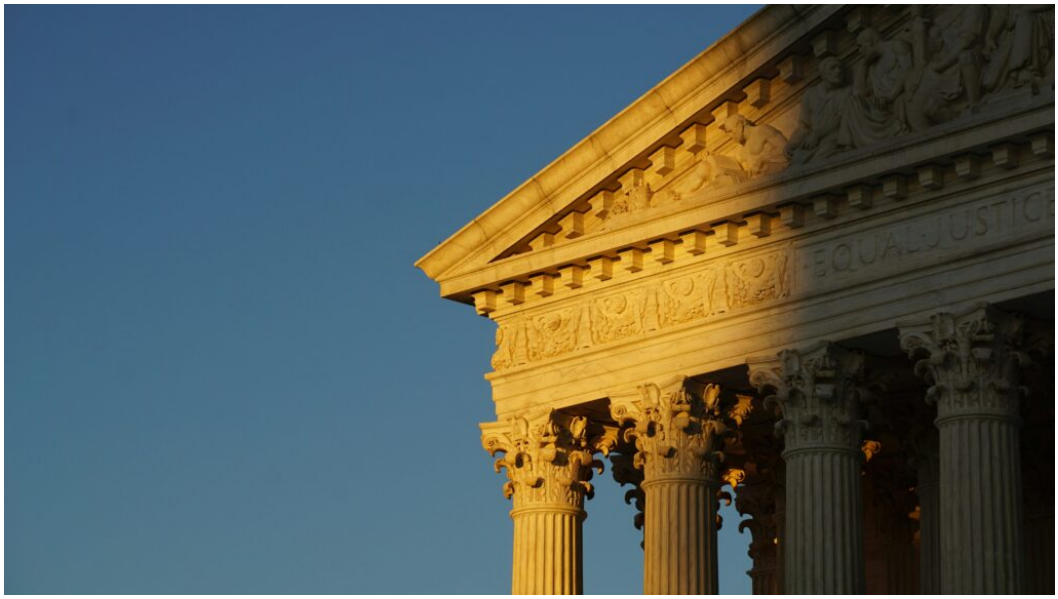


Photo: Ian Hutchinson, Unsplash

This past Supreme Court term didn’t feature one big climate blockbuster decision, but there were several decisions over federal workforce and funding that have major environmental impacts, **Ann Carlson** and other legal experts explain in this Grist piece. They raise “huge questions about the balance between the executive branch and Congress, and the executive branch’s ability and authority to simply ignore what Congress has appropriated,” Carlson says.

Last week, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued its landmark Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights (OC 32-25). My UCLA Law colleagues at **the Promise Institute** write that it “is a major step forward in understanding the human rights implications of the climate emergency and

establishing State obligations and standards under international human rights law to respond to the global ecological crisis.” Notable, the Court’s Advisory Opinion aligned with some key arguments developed in an amicus brief submitted by The Promise Institute’s team of experts working with former United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination.

In late June, the Hawai‘i Department of Transportation released a “Hawai‘i Energy Security and Waste Reduction Plan” for public comment. The plan is the result of a groundbreaking climate settlement agreement signed last year between the Hawai’i Governor and 13 plaintiffs who brought Navahine v. HDOT.

Brazil and COP30

A Reuters investigation by **Brad Haynes, Jackie Botts, Ricardo Brito,** and **Jake Spring** finds that many voluntary carbon credit projects meant to conserve forests in Brazil are also profiting people and businesses fined by Brazilian authorities for destroying the rainforest.

In May I wrote about the BBC and other US and UK media gleefully, and incorrectly, covering Brazil’s apparent hypocritical stance of building a road through the Amazon for COP30 attendees. “Turning the BBC report into a weapon against COP30 is a textbook disinformation tactic,” writes the Oii newsletter.

Other stories, studies, papers worth your time

A new data tool, called the Latino Climate and Health Dashboard, developed by UCLA’s Latino Policy and Politics Institute, highlights significant environmental health disparities between Latino and white neighborhoods in L.A., “providing critical insights amid escalating public health concerns linked to the places where climate change and the Trump administration’s recent immigration policy actions intersect,” the LAT reports.

In June, the International Panel on the Information Environment released a review of 300 climate science studies published between 2015 and 2025. Their findings “show that powerful actors — including corporations, governments, and political parties — intentionally spread inaccurate or misleading narratives about climate change.”

The Union of Concerned Scientists released a new report detailing how connecting

EVs to the grid and making them bidirectional could help save billions each year in electricity costs while delivering cleaner, more reliable electricity. The Climate Center says California should adopt policies encouraging bidirectional EVs as a way to keep leading, and its hosting a webinar on July 24, The Affordability and Public Health Benefits of Bidirectional Electric School Buses.

Good News

Maine is trying again to build out wind power in the far north by seeking developers to build at least 1,200 megawatts of land-based wind capacity and a transmission line to carry the electricity produced to the central part of the state, reports **Sarah Shemkus** for Canary Media.

A new net-zero, boutique hotel called the Sugar House Hotel will be the first LEED platinum-certified, all-electric hotel in the Marriott chain. The hotel planned to open next summer in Winooski, Vermont will feature a rooftop bar and restaurant, parking garage, and workforce housing development, reports the Burlington Free Press.

A petition signed by more than 110,000 people called for a ban on fossil fuel advertising in the United Kingdom, and it led to a debate in parliament. Labour MP Jacob Collier cited DeSmog investigations into Big Oil's strategies to delay climate action in opening remarks to the parliamentary debate.

Who doesn't love the sun?! "Globally, roughly a third more power is being generated from the sun this spring than last," writes Bill McKibben in his latest ode in the New Yorker to the staying power of solar.

Speaking of sun, organizers are planning a major day of nationwide action against billionaire polluters on September 21, 2025, the fall Equinox, and calling it "Sun Day." Check it out.