This week, President Trump vetoed two pieces of legislation, his first vetoes of his second term. There were two unusual points about these vetoes – even for this Administration. First, the bills in question were small, local matters. One bill involved a water project to benefit rural southeastern Colorado. The other bill expanded the scope of a Florida tribe's reservation. Second, both bills passed by voice vote – which means they were unopposed in both the House and the Senate. The White House officially claimed the vetoes were about fighting wasteful government spending, but the President's social media posts and news coverage indicate that they were about revenge on political opponents – the Democratic Colorado governor, and perhaps also Republican House members who have crossed Trump on other issues.

I flag these vetoes not because the underlying legislation is important, but because these vetoes are an escalation of the erratic and personalized decisionmaking of this Administration, an escalation that makes the possibility of any bipartisan legislation (including permitting reform) much harder to pursue. It seems unlikely that these bills would have been passed on a voice vote if there had been any hint of opposition from senior Executive Branch officials – and presumably the legislation received clearance from those officials during the legislative process. Thus, it's likely there was a deal that the Administration would support the bills – a deal that was blown up by the President to indulge his grudges. This should sound familiar – it is the same dynamic that we saw last week when the Administration reneged on deals with respect to offshore wind. It will be awfully hard to pass any sort of permitting reform legislation if legislators cannot trust Administration communications about what deals the Administration can strike in terms of statutory language. Moreover, this erratic behavior raises questions about whether any deal about permitting certainty – a key component of any permitting reform legislation – can be made or enforced with the Administration.

But there is an even bigger problem lurking here. While it has been hard for Congress to do high profile, high salience bipartisan legislation for over a decade now, Congress has still been able to enact low salience, low profile legislation on a bipartisan nature. Public lands, water, and Indian affairs legislation (like the two vetoed bills) has often passed in this way – through what is sometimes called "secret Congress" pathways in which legislation remains low profile, and thus unpolarized. But enacting legislation of this nature requires a belief that both parties will play fair – that one side won't renege on deals, or use their power to systematically kill deals that benefit the other side. And that is just what the

President did here. It is hard to imagine Democrats supporting future low profile bipartisan bills if only the bills that benefit the President's friends get signed. And if that dynamic takes hold, then nothing will get passed through Congress except through reconciliation. That includes permitting reform.

There's still some hope here. If the Republican leadership in the Senate and the House swiftly overrides these vetoes, then bipartisan deals can still be made despite the capriciousness of the current President. Such a step might happen – the Republican sponsor of the Colorado bill, a fairly right-wing representative, is angry about the veto. But that still leaves the problem of trying to enact a permitting reform deal that won't be undone by capricious executive action….