



They call it [Rollin' Coal](#) — when you retrofit your diesel truck (and they are always trucks) to emit more pollution. A lot more. You may have seen the [pictures](#): big dark clouds of fine particulates and a bounty of air toxics — a big f*#ck you to Prius drivers, environmentalists, and, well, all of us really. It was [kind of a thing](#) about ten years ago. And it's a perfect image for the MAGA approach to environmental law. Deeply nihilistic, full of rage, beyond stupid.

From [climate change](#) to [air](#) and [water pollution](#) to [industrial chemicals](#) and [hazardous waste](#) the second Trump Administration has distinguished itself during its first year in office by seemingly doing whatever it can to increase pollution, toxics, and environmental harm. The various rollbacks and giveaways have been well documented here on Legal Planet and by [others](#). So too has the staggering, ongoing [loss of government scientists](#) and civil servants at EPA and other agencies. Last year, during President Trump's first cabinet meeting, EPA administrator Lee Zeldin [bragged to the President](#) that he planned to cut two-thirds of EPA staff. While he still has work to do on that score, the combined effect of all the cuts and rollbacks has been to degrade and dismantle much of the basic framework that was carefully constructed over the last 50+ years to protect public health and the environment.

Some of this is straight out of [Project 2025](#)—a realization of Russell Vought's systematic effort to dismantle large parts of the regulatory state. Vought has made

no secret of his agenda—a “[right-wing absolute Zealot](#)” as White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles referred to him in her rather remarkable recent interview in [Vanity Fair](#). Whether measured in terms of shock and awe or long-term damage to the administrative state, Vought’s results are terrifyingly impressive.

Some of the great dismantling is, of course, also payback for the fossil fuel industry, the chemical industry, and polluters generally—an agenda that largely aligns with Vought’s. As in Trump’s first term, various [industry insiders](#) have been installed in key posts throughout EPA and other agencies. To date, these officials have been delivering in spades for their former employers. This too has been [well documented](#). It is hard to see this as anything other than a deliberate choice to trade the lives of real people for some modest additional profits for industry.

Lee Zeldin’s MAHA Moment?

The problem, of course, is that some of those real people supported President Trump and at least some of them seem to be paying more attention this time around. Last November it was widely reported that various MAHA influencers and, presumably, their patrons in the [multi-billion dollar wellness industry](#), were circulating a [petition](#) calling for the ouster of EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin because (get this) he was not doing enough to protect Americans from toxic chemicals and pesticides. One of the influencers who goes by the handle [Glyphosate Girl](#) was apparently [incensed](#) that chemical industry insiders and lobbyists had been appointed to key positions in the chemicals office at EPA. Of course, several of these [same industry insiders and lobbyists](#) were running the EPA chemicals office during the first Trump administration. Where was Glyphosate Girl when we needed her?

Notwithstanding the [insanity of MAHA vaccine policy](#) and the [sellout to Big Ag](#) (among the many contradictions of MAHA), the vocal concern with toxic chemicals and corporate influence over environmental policy suggests at least the possibility of [some political limits](#) to the Trump/MAGA dismantling of environmental protection. Turns out that some Trump supporters do understand that toxic chemicals are, well, toxic.

The September 2025 MAHA report, [Make Our Children Health Again](#), for example, highlights the role of environmental chemicals in contributing to chronic illness and calls out corporate influence and the pervasive problem of industry capture that has long plagued U.S. policy on toxic chemicals. Much of the reason why TSCA is, as I

tell my students, the “worstest” of all of our environmental laws is because of the [chemical industry's aggressive efforts](#) to make the law unworkable. The fact that MAHA is mobilizing on this issue suggests that toxic chemicals might have a different sort of political salience than say climate change. More on that in a future post.

Still, as much as we might hope that the MAHA movement's belated realization that Trump's toxics first agenda will not make American healthy again, the notion that this will somehow change things or even make life difficult for Zeldin and others, seems highly dubious. There is no reason, in other words, to expect any meaningful shift in the overall direction of travel. But why not, one might ask? Why shouldn't we expect to see at least some shift in policy as the whole MAHA/MAGA coalition begins to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions?

American Berserk

In my view, a big part of the reason stems from the fact that much of the Trump administration's assault on environmental protection over the last year cannot be reduced simply to industry giveaways and a Voughtian zeal to destroy the regulatory state. At a deeper level, it seems to stem from a perverse sort of joy in enacting gratuitous acts of [slow violence](#) against the rest of us. They are doing this because they can – to remind us all that they have the power. If people get sick and die because of these actions, well too bad. The death dealers are back in charge. Trumpism as a form of [necropolitics](#).

Violence is the key here. The goal is to break things by unleashing the dark forces that have been stirring in American politics for much of the last generation (and have always been lurking below the surface). And it is here that we come to back to the symbolic importance of Rollin' Coal as a gesture of nihilism and irrationality and its total intractability to the technocratic mindset.

While much of Trumpism's ongoing attack on environmental law is often chalked up to [polarization](#) and the endless [culture wars](#) that have now spilled over into virtually every area of public concern, efforts to explain the current moment by pointing to structural shifts in the electorate and the polarization of everything simply beg the question. Environment was once a bipartisan concern, we are often reminded. The Clean Air Act amendments of 1970 passed [unanimously in the Senate](#) and received only [a single No vote in the House](#). The 1990 Clean Air Act amendments similarly passed with [huge bipartisan majorities](#). Lots of other examples can be trotted out

to make the point. But those days are long gone. And none of that explains Trump, Vought, Musk, Zeldin, and all their various apparatchiks who seem hellbent on environmental destruction.

As others have pointed out, the [relentless increase in inequality](#) over the last several decades and the [deep resentments against blue state \(coastal\) elites](#) have surely worked to further politicize issues such as climate change, clean energy, and environmental protection—issues that (rightly or wrongly) might seem like luxury goods to those facing a deeply entrenched cost of living crisis and rising levels of economic precarity. But again, this too just begs the question of how these structural conditions create the possibility for something like Trumpism and its wholesale attack on environmental law.

No doubt the grievance filled populist rage that Trump has mobilized has found an easy target in environmentalists and climate activists—those [radical left lunatics](#) who still accept the science showing that toxic chemicals can cause cancer or that fine particulates make people sick or that greenhouse gases are warming the planet and endangering all of us.

Politics, and American politics in particular, has always been a [realm of diabolical forces](#). The irrationality of it all is actually the point. Trumpism is more a symptom of this than a cause; a manifestation of what the novelist [Philip Roth](#) once called the “indigenous American berserk”—a hard-wired tendency in the American psyche to jump the tracks into irrationality, conspiracy theories, violence, and self-sabotage—a form of national madness that is always latent, sometimes contained, but never vanquished.

If this diagnosis is even partially correct, it suggests that in addition to all of the necessary plans for how to rebuild our institutions and our laws, how to create productive spaces for civil conversation across differences, how to fix the damn roads and get shit done to demonstrate that government can solve problems, we also need to keep one eye on the deeper cultural forces that are swirling just below the surface in these [nihilistic times](#) and the conditions that allow those forces to congeal and amalgamate into potent political movements that have the capacity to destroy all that we hold dear.