

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 26, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

We write with concern over the politicization of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its mission to protect human health and the environment. In particular, we are concerned that EPA is ceasing enforcement of environmental protection laws and forcing out nonpartisan staff in an effort to enact the radical agenda laid out in Project 2025. To understand the rapid changes that have taken place at the agency since January 20, 2025, we request that you provide documents and communications related to EPA's paused enforcement actions and associated policy changes.

On his first day in office, President Trump issued the Executive Order "Unleashing American Energy," which directed federal agencies to prioritize domestic energy resources, especially fossil fuel-based energy. Under this Executive Order, all agencies are directed to "assess whether enforcement discretion of authorities and regulations can be utilized to advance the policy" laid out in the Executive Order, which could lead the EPA to effectively shut down enforcement actions across the country—something that already appears to be occurring.¹

On January 24, 2025, then-Acting EPA Administrator James Payne issued a directive ordering EPA staff to halt all external communications.² Following that directive, K.C. Schefski, the Acting Director of EPA's Office of Civil Enforcement, sent an email stating that any meetings or negotiations with outside parties on administrative matters needed to be postponed.

¹ Exec. Order No. 14154, 90 Fed. Reg. 8353 (Jan. 20, 2025). This Executive Order is only one of several actions that President Trump initiated on his first day in office that will weaken environmental protections. *See Drill Baby Drill: Trump Takes Aim at Clean Energy, Climate Change and the Environment on Day One*, Los Angeles Time (Jan. 20, 2025) (online at www.latimes.com/environment/story/2025-01-20/trump-day-one-environment-energy-climate-change).

² *Acting EPA Administrator Directs Staff to Halt Outside Communications*, Inside EPA (Jan. 24, 2025) (online at <https://insideepa.com/daily-news/acting-epa-administrator-directs-staff-halt-outside-communications>).

One EPA employee explained that “all enforcement is effectively shut down by this directive,” adding that the directive “pretty much shuts down EPA.”³

This pause in enforcement coupled with the January 20, 2025 Executive Order threatens to roll back all of the progress made on improving environmental enforcement under President Biden and will do tangible harm to communities across the country.⁴ As David Uhlmann, the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA) under President Biden, has explained, even a short pause in enforcement would “send an unmistakable message that polluters will not be held accountable and communities will not be protected in the ways required by our nation’s environmental laws.”⁵

In addition to pausing EPA enforcement actions, the Trump Administration appears to be pushing out key enforcement officials at the agency. During President Trump’s second week in office, career senior EPA officials who oversaw key sections of EPA’s work were demoted, including at OECA.⁶ Notably, Project 2025 calls for the elimination of OECA.⁷

Project 2025 also calls for eliminating the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights (OEJECR).⁸ This is already underway as part of President Trump’s January 20, 2025, Executive Order on “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” which called for the termination of all offices and positions related to environmental justice.⁹ Since January 20, 2025, nearly 170 employees at OEJECR have been put on administrative leave.¹⁰

As President Trump implements the Project 2025 playbook across the federal government, it appears that Project 2025 contributors are working closely with political appointees at the EPA. On February 6, 2025, President Trump even appointed Scott Mason IV, who advised the author of the EPA chapter in Project 2025, as the Regional Administrator for EPA Region 6.¹¹

³ *Trump Presses Pause on Parts of the Federal Government*, Washington Post (Jan. 24, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/01/24/trump-slows-federal-government/).

⁴ Environmental Integrity Project, *Report: EPA Enforcement Could Be Cut Sharply by Second Trump Administration* (Dec. 16, 2024) (online at <https://environmentalintegrity.org/news/report-epa-enforcement-could-be-cut-sharply-by-second-trump-administration/>).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *E.P.A. Demotes Career Employees Overseeing Science, Enforcement, and More*, New York Times (Feb. 4, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/02/04/climate/epa-workers-demotions-trump.html).

⁷ Mandy Gunasekara, *Project 2025: Environmental Protection Agency* (2023) (online at https://static.project2025.org/2025_MandateForLeadership_CHAPTER-13.pdf).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Exec. Order No. 14151, 90 Fed. Reg. 8339.

¹⁰ *EPA Employees Who Work on Environmental Justice Are Put on Leave*, NPR (Feb. 7, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/02/06/nx-s1-5289331/epa-employees-who-work-on-environmental-justice-are-put-on-leave).

¹¹ *Project 2025 Adviser Takes the Reins at EPA Region Including Texas*, Texas Tribune (Feb. 10, 2025) (online at www.texastribune.org/2025/02/10/texas-epa-region-6-administrator-environmental-protection-agency/).

In order to better understand the current status and future of EPA enforcement, as well as the role that Project 2025 and its authors and contributors have played and continue to play in setting environmental policy, we request that you provide the following documents no later than March 11, 2025:

1. Any directives, orders, emails, or other communications to staff regarding ongoing judicial or administrative enforcement actions from January 20, 2025, to the present;
2. For any enforcement actions have not been resolved through a final administrative or judicial consent decree or judgment, or by a final administrative order, the following documents issued by EPA from January 20, 2021, to the present:
 - a. All judicial consent decrees that have been lodged but not yet entered by a federal court;
 - b. All Administrative Orders that have not been finalized, e.g., through an Administrative Order on Consent;
 - c. All Notices of Violation or Findings of Violations;
 - d. All information requests issued pursuant to EPA's enforcement authority;
 - e. All inspection reports;
 - f. All indictments in cases involving criminal violations of environmental law;
3. All communications related to the appointment of Scott Mason IV as EPA Regional Administrator for EPA Region 6 from July 14, 2024, to the present;
4. All communications between EPA and any contributors to Project 2025, including Mandy Gunasekara, David Harlow, Justin Schwab, Aaron Szabo, Clint Woods from January 1, 2023, to the present;
5. All EPA documents and records released to any contributors to Project 2025, including Mandy Gunasekara, David Harlow, Justin Schwab, Aaron Szabo, Clint Woods from January 1, 2023, to the present; and
6. All internal communications sent or received by EPA officials mentioning any contributors to Project 2025, including Mandy Gunasekara, David Harlow, Justin Schwab, Aaron Szabo, Clint Woods from January 1, 2023, to the present.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member



Maxwell Frost
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Growth,
Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman