Daily Opinion

The Daily Campus

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Karla Perez.....EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tomas Hinckley.....OPINION EDITOR
Patrick Minnerly ... ASSOCIATE OPINION EDITOR

Gianna Cassino .....WEEKLY COLUMNIST

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed by individual writers in the opinion section do not reflect the views and opinions of The Daily Campus or other staff members. Only articles labeled "Editorial" are the official opinions of The Daily Campus.

Patrick's Politics:

WITHOUT CLIMATE REGULATIONS, THE EPA PROTECTS NOTHING

by Patrick Minnerly
ASSOCIATE OPINION EDITOR
HE/HIM/HIS
patrick.minnerly@uconn.edu



Donald Trump, the 47th President of the United States of America. Trump is one of the few presidents to serve two non-consecutive terms. PHOTO COURTESY OF HISTORY.COM

Donald Trump has never been one to side with science, especially climate science. He has often spread false claims about climate change being some sort of "hoax" or "scam." You can imagine, then, how he feels about the Environmental Protection Agency, which is supposed to help counteract the effects of climate change and – as the name suggests – keep the environment healthy. A major pillar of the EPA's efforts pre-Trump was the 2009 "endangerment finding," which established the government position that greenhouse gases were detrimental to human health. However, the Trump administration announced it was formally revoking the EPA's endangerment finding last week, beginning the supposed "single largest deregulatory action in U.S. history." This revocation goes against established fact in order to service the interests of big business and the MAGA movement's obsession with climate change denial. It leaves the EPA adrift and powerless, unable to address the ongoing tide of global warming.

The endangerment finding was built on a 2007 Supreme Court case, Massachusetts v. EPA, which determined that the EPA did have the authority under the 1970 Clean Air Act to regulate greenhouse gases because of their threat to public health. This decision allowed the EPA to carry out regulatory policies to restrict emissions of these harmful gases.

Regulations are particularly important for transportation, which represents the largest share – 28% – of greenhouse gases released by the U.S. each year. The EPA's own website says as much, which is deeply ironic given the Trump administration's new policy eliminates all federal regulations on greenhouse gas emissions for vehicles and engines from 2012 onwards. These regulations help prevent companies from simply having their fossil fuel output run rampant. Eliminating the regulations would mean America is now significantly out of step with other industrialized countries, which are busy expanding their own environmental protections and renewable energy sources. Trump's mission of deregulation represents a major step backwards, and it's about to cast aside restrictions in an area where the U.S. is already failing to protect the environment.

Essentially, the Trump administration's main argument for revoking the endangerment finding is that American taxpayers will save $1.3 trillion due to deregulation. Since the idea of cost is apparently so important to Trump, according to a federal report from 2023, climate change is costing the U.S. $150 billion per year. That is a conservative estimate that only factors in direct damages, and the number will only grow larger as temperatures and sea levels rise, setting up more frequent and more destructive extreme weather events.

The current EPA's obsession with cost is no surprise. At the beginning of this year, the agency announced that it would no longer consider the amount of lives saved when determining regulations on air pollution, instead only calculating the cost to industry and businesses. Even for this craven administration, it was an on-the-nose decision that lays bare their callousness. For Trump, the accumulation of money is far more important than protecting public health. This strictly business-based reasoning has now been extended to the endangerment finding; the White House website even lists a litany of fossil fuel and energy executives celebrating the finding's revocation.

Yet the Trump administration ignores that cost is a highly suspect way to measure the impacts of climate change in the first place. The damage of global warming is difficult to quantify, but we know its effects will significantly affect human life for the worse. As the Earth gets hotter and more inhospitable, we are barreling towards the point of no return when our effects on the climate cannot be stopped, and that future cannot be quantified in numbers. It can only be quantified in the suffering that will result. People will have to uproot their entire lives to deal with ever-more frequent disasters and the long-term effects of global heating, especially in coastal areas where seas will rise. The country of Tuvalu, a Pacific island nation, is already trying to upload a digital copy of itself in the face of being swallowed by the rising ocean. The potential loss of an entire nation cannot be quantified, and neither can many of climate change's adverse effects.

At the heart of the Trump administration's decision is catering to the MAGA base. For years, Trump and the rightwing media apparatus have primed Republicans to be very skeptical of climate change, or at least deny it is a pressing issue. According to surveys from Pew Research Center, just 12% of Republicans think dealing with climate change should be a top priority. Deregulation has also long been a crucial part of the Republican agenda – the Reaganite principle of trickle-down economics rests partly on deregulation of businesses. In addition, the current EPA administrator, Lee Zeldin, formerly served as a Republican U.S. House member and was previously most well-known as a Trump sycophant. He was specifically selected as a fully political, rightwing appointee.

Trump's history of spreading conspiracy theories and falsehoods about climate change has served to muddy the waters with his base about whether the climate crisis is indeed real. Global heating has been settled science for years, but Republicans have grown more indifferent towards tackling it in recent years. Since Trump first took power after winning the 2016 election, ignoring climate change has become a political cudgel, wielded against the idea of "wokeness."

All of this means gutting the EPA's authority doesn't hold much meaning with Republicans, but it should. The climate crisis affects both Democrats and Republicans, independents and radicals. It is a crisis for humanity itself.

Humanity, however, is not the Trump administration's concern. The EPA, instead of protecting the environment and public health, is now beholden to the interests of fossil fuel corporations and purely political considerations. Without regulations, the EPA will work to increase the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, not decrease them. The agency has corrupted its mission, because without the endangerment finding, it is useless. And useless is just how Trump wants it.