



Zeldin's Spin Machine

Political Gaslighting in the EPA's Public Communications

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Introduction

As discussed in [Burning Down the EPA: Documenting the Second Trump Administration's Historic Assault](#), in the first six months of the second Trump administration, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin has led the agency to fundamentally weaken environmental protections by using four major strategies—deregulation, defunding, downsizing, and sidelining science. This previous EDGI report discussed Zeldin's actions and the effects of those actions; here, we discuss how Zeldin and his press office frame the public messaging about the EPA. Zeldin's press office uses press releases, social media posts, and op-eds (his "spin machine") to both tout the "traditional" duties of the EPA while also promoting President Trump's plans. [Gaslighting](#)—using outright lies, distortions, contradictions, as well as hypocritical and disingenuous claims—fuel the flurry of pronouncements behind Zeldin's agenda. In this preliminary report, we explore confusion, contradiction, and division that emerge from Zeldin's press releases and other public communications. While simultaneously praising EPA activities and also President Trump's anti-EPA agenda, we find that Zeldin's communication tactics mimic political gaslighting in disturbing ways.

This report proceeds by briefly reviewing Zeldin's professional history, including his previous public relations experience. Next, we discuss political gaslighting as a concept. Finally, we note several examples of political gaslighting that emerge across Zeldin's various press communications and other public comments, especially as it relates to messaging that sows confusion, contradiction, and division.

Who is Lee Zeldin?

On November 11, 2024, then president-elect Trump's transition team announced Lee Zeldin as the choice to be the 17th administrator of the EPA. Prior to his political career, Zeldin earned both a B.A. in political science and J.D. from SUNY Albany. He also served in the Army and practiced law in New York State. Zeldin served in New York State's Senate from 2010 through 2014 and in the U.S. House of Representatives from 2015 through 2023. In 2023, Zeldin [launched a Political Action Committee](#) ("Leadership America Needs PAC") designed to increase GOP

voter turnout. Later that year, Zeldin also launched a consulting firm (“Zeldin Strategies”) [“to specialize in public relations, crisis management, strategy, and acquisitions.”](#)

Zeldin’s nomination to lead the EPA was [surprising and concerning](#) to many environmental advocates. Zeldin [lacks experience](#) on issues of importance for the EPA, [equivocates on climate change](#), and [struggled to field specific questions](#) about several environmental issues at his Senate confirmation hearing. Zeldin [did notch some environmental wins for his constituents](#) during his time in Congress, however [the League of Conservation Voters found Congressman Zeldin cast only 32 pro-environmental votes versus 200 anti-environmental votes](#) during his tenure. When running for Congress and for Governor, Zeldin [accepted \\$410,000](#) in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry. Analyses of Zeldin’s [financial disclosures](#) reveal that, since leaving Congress, he was [paid \\$120,500 from public relations firms to pen op-eds](#). *Business Insider* links these payments to two op-eds on environmental, social, and governance initiatives and another calling for removal of New York’s ban on fracking. Some of these public relations firms represent Chevron, the American Petroleum Institute, and other energy companies. This background illustrates: 1) experience using the press in an attempt to shape public opinion about environmental issues, 2) potential conflicts of interest, and 3) lack of experience in environmental issues.

Political Gaslighting & Zeldin’s Spin Machine

Recently, the word gaslighting has [increasingly been applied in the context of politics](#), including characterizations of how politicians communicate with and relate to their constituents, colleagues, voters, and the media. Dr. Robin Stern and Dr. Marc Brackett, experts on the topic and co-founders of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, [define gaslighting](#) as “a form of emotional abuse where the abuser leads the target to question their judgements, reality, and even their own sanity.” The goal of a gaslighter is to maintain power and control over their targets. Stern [explains](#) that, over time, gaslightees lose trust in their senses and make concessions to accommodate the reality of their gaslighters. Stern and Brackett have described how gaslighting behavior commonly observed in abusive intimate relationships can also be observed in politics, a trend they describe as “political

gaslighting.” President Trump has frequently been accused of [gaslighting](#), both while [in office](#) and [on the campaign trail](#).

Echoing Trump and much of MAGA’s leadership, several messages from Zeldin’s EPA exemplify Stern and Brackett’s descriptions of political gaslighting. In the sections that follow, we present communications from Zeldin and his EPA in that mold. We focus particularly on communications that “sow confusion and division”—themes Stern and Brackett identify as one of the signs of political gaslighting. We further break down this communication style into communications that 1) lack transparency, 2) promote misleading or false information, 3) contradict and confuse, and 4) sow division.

Sowing Confusion and Division

Zeldin’s Lack of Transparency

Governmental transparency stands as the strongest enemy of gaslighting and attempts to sow confusion. The Zeldin EPA has frequently taken steps to minimize the ability of the public to have a voice in governmental decisions (even when mandated by law) or to limit publicly available information. A [recent report by the Union of Concerned Scientists](#) found that in almost a third of final rules issued by six science agencies (including the EPA), the administration “bypassed the public notice and comment period, cutting the public out of the process of shaping rules that affect their health and safety and our planet.”

When touting accomplishments, Zeldin rarely makes it easy to verify details. A good example of this comes from a deep dive into the list of the agency’s “[100 environmental accomplishments](#),” released by the press office on April 30, 2025. A [second list](#) was posted for the second 100 days of the administration and a [third for the most recent 100 days](#). The goal of the lists seems obvious: to reassure the public that Trump’s EPA continues to protect human health and the environment and that business continues as usual at the EPA. However, perhaps one of the most striking things the accomplishments reveal are less in their content and more in what they tell us about the related lessons of accessible public data and government transparency. After dedicating considerable time searching for publicly

available information on each of the first 100 accomplishments, EDGI researchers were only able to directly verify 51 of them: 32 were correct, 6 false, and 14 misleading. (See appendix for a list of these accomplishments).

Although 32 of the 100 were verified as correct, slightly more than that number (33) simply lacked available data to confirm or were overly vague. For example, number 57 claims that the EPA secured “\$296 million worth of cleanups addressing more than 700,000 cubic yards of contamination,” when amounts of contamination are rarely publicly available. Other items in the first list lacking data were incredibly vague or used undefined terms: Number 83 touts “inspected and mitigated vapor intrusion impacting Los Angeles from a former Superfund site.” Given the large number of former Superfund sites in southern California, narrowing this down proved difficult. Others were so general as to be applicable to the EPA at any point in time. Number 79, for example, claims that the EPA “oversaw cleanups at tribal and local jurisdictions under CERCLA and [the] Clean Water Act.” Moreover, when EDGI researchers reached out to relevant state and tribal officials on certain accomplishments for more information, some had no knowledge of what happened. EDGI is in the process of filing multiple FOIA requests for this missing information.

Promoting Misleading or False Information

Six of the 100 first accomplishments are completely false. For example, several of the accomplishments tout enforcement efforts in intercepting pesticides at our border. These include number 48, which states that the EPA “blocked illegal pesticide imports totaling over 200,000 pounds across multiple regions,” and number 72, which claims that the EPA “intercepted 56,000 pounds of unregulated pesticides in Region 4.” EDGI checked these claims through [EPA's Administrative Enforcement Dockets database](#) which provides detailed, searchable information about legal agreements and dockets across the 10 regions and headquarters beginning in 1999. The database revealed that only Region 8 issued “deny entry” orders for illegal pesticides entering the United States under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) during the first 100 days, countering those

two accomplishments claiming otherwise.¹ Although not easily searchable, the database provides information so that the public can theoretically hold the government accountable for these false statements.

Only six accomplishments have been verified as false, but an additional 14 are misleading. The last of the accomplishments, which “announced major actions to combat PFAS contamination,” stands as a clear example of Zeldin’s efforts to mislead. Given that the EPA has been involved in PFAS research and enforcement for some time, the use of the word “major” is an overstatement. Further, rather than assist in regulating the compounds (as this accomplishment implies), Zeldin actually announced that the EPA would delay implementation of these actions until 2031. He also noted that other PFAS regulations would be rescinded and reworked. These actions delay and hinder efforts against forever chemicals rather than “combat” them.

Additionally, it’s implied that the first 100 accomplishments were all accomplished during Trump’s watch. Yet of these 100 accomplishments, 93% were underway before Inauguration Day on January 21, 2025. Further, 16 of the 100 were initiated during the Biden administration, and only 7 took place entirely under the second Trump administration.

Even more misleading, several accomplishments claimed as Trump’s work actually took place *entirely* within the Biden administration. One of the best examples of Zeldin wrongfully claiming credit for a Biden accomplishment is Number 22 in the first accomplishments list, which states that the EPA “developed a method to detect 40 PFAS compounds in water sources.” Work on Method 133a, which tests for 40 different PFAS compounds in sewage sludge and other biosolids, was wholly done during the Biden administration. Scientists submitted a draft of the method in August 2021. Testing, verification, and approval followed in December 2024, and the EPA published the results in the Federal Register on Inauguration Day 2025. All that awaited the Zeldin EPA was to receive comments through March 24 and

¹ The possibility exists that the enforcement database has not been properly or fully updated, although this also contributes to the lack of transparency issue.

incorporate any responses into the final rule. The administration played no role in the development of the method itself.

Some of the accomplishments exaggerate or overblow the Trump administration's efforts during the first 100 days. In accomplishment 20, which involved cleanup of a small mercury spill at a residence in Ohio, the spill, investigation, and removal of the mercury took place during the Biden administration. Trump's EPA only completed 2 days of work (of the 8 total) on the issue involving the disposal of the mercury and contaminated materials. The list also includes 7 accomplishments claimed by Trump for responding to Hurricane Helene, which struck in late September 2024. Yet the majority of the effort responding to Helene took place during the Biden administration. FEMA assigned the EPA the role of assisting with water and hazardous materials needs, and in that capacity 99 EPA employees, including approximately 20 contractors, were assigned, constituting about 2.7% of the total number of federal employees assigned. Cell service, power, and water were restored by November, and the majority of other recovery efforts were completed in December. The EPA's [own news releases from February 2025](#) verify that the bulk of the work was during the Biden administration. Claiming these as a Zeldin/Trump accomplishment is an overstatement.

Contradiction and Confusion

According to Stern, political gaslighting also involves “constant contradiction” and “shifting narratives.” The Union of Concerned Scientists notes [several contradictions](#) between Zeldin's stated aims, the mission of the EPA, and the recent actions taken by the administration. Below we use information from Zeldin's Senate testimonies and other EPA outputs to further illustrate the contradictory messages from Zeldin's EPA. We focus on three areas of contradiction, where Zeldin seems both “for” and “against” issues: EPA staff, science, and scientists; environmental justice; and addressing climate change.

For and Against: EPA Staff, Science, and Scientists

In his [Senate confirmation hearing](#), Zeldin committed to supporting the EPA, praising the dedication of career staffers. Specifically, Zeldin stated, “I will foster a collaborative culture within the agency, supporting career staff who have dedicated

themselves to this mission.” He later recognized the limits of his knowledge and expressed appreciation for scientists, noting that he would “defer to the talented scientists” and “defer to the research of the scientists.” When questioned by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-Rhode Island) about carbon dioxide and fossil fuel combustion, Zeldin responded:

Senator, while I am someone who believes strongly that we should work with the scientists, leaving the science to the scientists, the policy to the policy makers, and that we all work together, I don't sit before you as a scientist. Fortunately, at EPA we do have many talented scientists who provide that research. They have that talent to be able to tell us exactly what the metrics are of their research.

These comments insinuate an understanding of the importance of science, high esteem for career staff and scientists at the EPA, and the need for empirically informed policy.

However, Zeldin's actions as administrator tell a different story. As EPA administrator, Zeldin has removed databases from the EPA's website, obstructing access to information that scientists rely on. Zeldin has [cancelled hundreds of grants worth billions of dollars](#) in funding. In several instances, this [terminated support scientists depend on to conduct their research](#). In July, the EPA reported a [loss of 3,707 employees](#) since January, including through DOGE's “fork in the road” program, deferred resignations, and early retirements. This is nearly a [23% reduction in the EPA's entire workforce in less than 7 months](#) and [may go as high as 33% by the end of the year](#). In addition, despite his vocal support of science, Zeldin later announced that the agency was abolishing the Office of Research and Development.

For and Against: Environmental Justice

Another confusing disconnect between rhetoric and actions revolves around the EPA's treatment of environmental justice issues. The uneven distribution of environmental hazards in the United States is well documented. Specifically, low income communities and communities of color have historically been

over-burdened with exposure to pollution. Environmental justice work aims to address these disparities. Zeldin himself, [in a March press release](#), noted that the “idea” of environmental justice “sounds good in theory and receives bipartisan support.” In the first 100 accomplishments list, 31% of the accomplishments named on the list address environmental justice issues, even though they are not labeled as such on the list. Accomplishments 60 and 81, for example, are both cleanups in African American communities, prioritized for action and remediation in the Biden administration.

Despite claiming environmental justice as “good in theory” and specific cases as accomplishments, the actions of Zeldin’s EPA are hostile to environmental justice work. In February, Zeldin’s EPA [announced](#) that eleven Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility EPA employees and 161 Environmental Justice EPA employees were placed on administrative leave. A March 12, 2025, EPA press release announced the termination of the [environmental justice and DEI arms of the EPA](#). A September 2025 [EDGI report](#) found the EPA withdrew \$2.5 billion in environmental justice grants, removing \$6 billion in economic benefits, including the loss of 65,000 jobs. Confusingly, while the EPA denounces and dismantles environmental justice and DEI efforts, their 100 accomplishments list praises and takes credit for openly EJ-related projects.

For and Against: Addressing Climate Change

The agency’s relationship to fossil fuels and climate change under Zeldin also generates confusion. Zeldin’s open support of industry, deregulation, the auto industry, and AI conflict with the mission of EPA to protect human health and the environment. [Zeldin’s strategic pillars](#), as [analyzed in an EDGI report](#), support Trump’s agenda of “restoring” American energy dominance by increasing fossil fuel production and marginalizing clean energy.

Trump glorifies fossil fuel energy, yet Zeldin’s accomplishments tout the agency’s work addressing the negative effects of fossil fuels. A large percentage of Superfund and other cleanup sites are hazardous due to petroleum by-products. Accomplishment 85 in the first 100 accomplishments list discusses the cleanup of a contaminated creek due to a hydraulic oil spill in Whitehouse, Ohio, which

consumed about two months of EPA time and resulted in the removal of 100,000 gallons of oil and contaminated water from the site. Additionally, in natural disasters, oil and propane become hazardous materials needing to be cleaned up, as seen during Hurricane Helene and mentioned repeatedly in the accomplishments. PFAS chemicals (mentioned in six accomplishments in the first list) are a result of petroleum refining. Air quality (11 accomplishments in the first list) suffers and needs regulation due to car emissions. Ironically, Trump's support for fossil fuels produces more work for the EPA.

Zeldin's communications around climate change are also confusing. To marginalize climate science and remove the EPA from regulating greenhouse gases, Zeldin has [proposed to rescind the keystone endangerment finding](#). The finding, backed by the courts, requires the EPA to regulate greenhouse gases because of their impact on human health and the environment. If Zeldin revokes this finding, a major roadblock to Trump's environmental agenda would be removed.²

Despite marginalizing and denying climate change, a wide array of the 100 accomplishments, particularly ones covering responses to Hurricane Helene and the January 2025 California wildfires, spring directly from the intensification of natural disasters due to climate change. In addition, more confusingly, the agency has touted clean energy or the reduction of greenhouse gases positively on social media and in press releases. In one post, for example, [Zeldin praises the return of industry to America](#), since it would lead to lowered greenhouse gases. In [a press release](#), he claims to be rethinking oil and gas regulations while "continuing our

² Given that comments

(<https://www.regulations.gov/document/EPA-HQ-OAR-2025-0194-0093/comment>) on the proposal to rescind the endangerment finding are overwhelmingly against rescinding the finding, Zeldin's EPA may have trouble justifying such an action. When comments closed in late September 2025, the EPA had received an astounding 568,243 comments on the proposal (over 30,000 of which, as of 12/15/25 have been made public).

<https://eos.org/research-and-developments/public-speaks-out-against-epa-plan-to-rescind-endangerment-finding>;

<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/comment-deluge-shows-opposition-to-nixing-endangerment-finding>;

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/21082025/public-hearing-attendees-speak-out-against-repeal-of-epa-endangerment-finding/>

trajectory as a leader in clean energy and emissions regulations.” Overall, the agency’s public statements on climate continue to be incredibly confusing.

Sowing Division

Stern also cautions that sowing division and employing aggressive criticism can be a part of political gaslighting. At times, communications from Zeldin and/or the EPA’s official accounts appear to stoke political antagonism, similar to trends [EDGI documents in a prior report](#). This antagonism can be seen in op-eds by Zeldin in his first six months as EPA Administrator, all of which are listed in Table 1. From January 20, 2025, through June 30, 2025, Zeldin penned 10 op-eds. In the titles of these op-eds, “Trump” appears six times, consistently in positive and praiseworthy contexts. For example:

March 4, 2025: “Trump’s EPA is Giving us a Cleaner Environment and Increased Prosperity: We are demonstrating that environmental protection and economic growth are complementary.” *National Review*.

May 1, 2025: “100 days in, Trump’s EPA is Powering the Great American Comeback.” *The Hill*.

By comparison, Biden’s name appears twice, both times framed negatively. Trump’s name also appears in these titles. The titles including both Biden and Trump’s names insinuate that Biden’s EPA engaged in “scams” and was fiscally irresponsible, while Trump’s EPA is not. For example:

April 1, 2025: “Why We’re Shutting Down Biden’s EPA Museum: Under President Trump’s Leadership, Fiscal Responsibility and Mission Focus Will Guide Every Decision.” *Fox News Digital*.

April 4, 2025: “So Long to Biden’s ‘Environmental Justice’ Scams—Team Trump is Tackling REAL Threats to Water, Air.” *New York Post*.

This political antagonism extends to policy measures as well. One op-ed panned the Green New Deal (a Biden administration policy) while another lauded the “One Big

Beautiful Bill” (a Trump administration policy). Another praised one of Trump’s executive orders. For example:

March 12, 2025: “EPA Ends the ‘Green New Deal:’ We’re Keeping People and the Environment Safe While Overhauling Rules that Stifled Our Full Potential.” *Wall Street Journal*.

June 8, 2025: “Alaska’s Energy Renaissance Awaits, and the One Big Beautiful Bill is the Key to Unlocking it.” *Anchorage Daily News*.

June 10, 2025: “Start Your Rigs: Alaska is our 'Gateway to Energy Dominance:' President Trump's executive order unleashes state's extraordinary resources while creating jobs and strengthening national security.” *Fox News*.

Table 1. List of Op-Eds authored by EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin from January 20, 2025 – June 30, 2025.

Date Published	Title	Outlet
February 28	A Record-Breaking Response: How the EPA Tackled California’s Wildfire Crisis	<i>Breitbart</i>
March 4	Trump's EPA is Giving us a Cleaner Environment and Increased Prosperity: We are demonstrating that environmental protection and economic growth are complementary	<i>National Review</i>
March 12	EPA Ends the ‘Green New Deal’: We’re keeping people and the environment safe while overhauling rules that stifled our full potential.	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>
April 1	Why we're shutting down Biden's EPA museum: Under President Trump's leadership, fiscal responsibility and mission focus will guide every decision	<i>Fox News Digital</i>
April 4	So long to Biden's 'environmental justice' scams—Team Trump is tackling REAL threats to water, air	<i>New York Post</i>

May 1	100 days in, Trump's EPA is powering the great American comeback	<i>The Hill</i>
May 2	Making the EPA Efficient-- and Exceptional	<i>Newsweek</i>
June 8	Alaska's energy renaissance awaits, and the One Big Beautiful Bill is the key to unlocking it *	<i>Anchorage Daily News</i>
June 10	Start Your Rigs: Alaska is our 'Gateway to Energy Dominance': President Trump's executive order unleashes state's extraordinary resources while creating jobs and strengthening national security	<i>Fox News</i>
June 28	Trump's energy dominance plans driving manufacturing renaissance in Milwaukee: Mining equipment manufacturing and the technology that comes with it is returning to America thanks to policies that support American energy development	<i>Milwaukee Journal Sentinel</i>

*Co-authored with Doug Bergum (Dept of the Interior) and Chris Wright (Secretary Dept of Energy)

Analyses of EPA press releases indicate politicization and political antagonism have increased under Zeldin. We examined the first five months (approximately) of EPA press release titles following the three most recent U.S. presidential inaugurations for mentions of current and preceding presidents. Our results are displayed in Figure 1 and show that while the majority of EPA press releases do not mention current or past presidents, **Zeldin's EPA has issued many more press releases naming a president in the title than his predecessors**. This is particularly true with respect to naming a *former* president. While Pruitt's EPA press release titles never mention Obama, and Regan's only mention Trump once, Zeldin's press office names Biden 18 times.

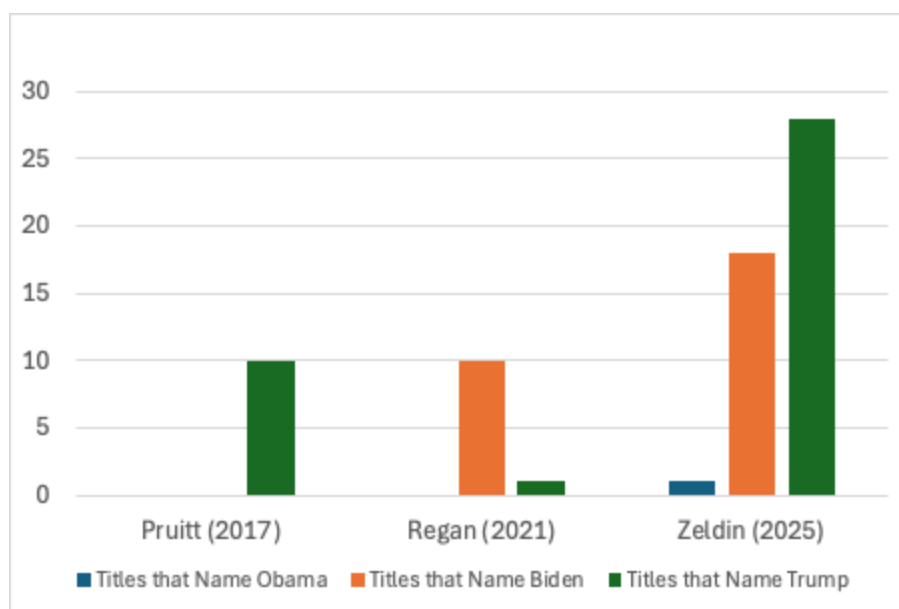


Figure 1. Number of EPA press releases naming current or former U.S. President in title or subtitle, in the first five months after Inauguration Day.

To further contextualize these findings, we conducted word frequency analyses of EPA press release titles and subtitles published in the first five months after inauguration. Figure 2 includes three word clouds featuring the top 100 most frequently occurring words appearing in these titles and subtitles, per administration. Results reveal the majority of titles under all administrations do not mention current or former presidents. When they do, presidents are not mentioned in equal measure across administrations. For example, no U.S. president's name makes the list of 100 most frequently occurring words in EPA press release titles under EPA Administrator Michael Regan. However, under both Administrators Pruitt and Zeldin, "Trump" appears in the list of 100 most frequently used words. Under Zeldin, "Biden" is also one of the most frequently used words (as is "Harris"). Of note, the Regan EPA issued far more press releases in about the first five months of the Biden administration (650 total) than either Zeldin (374 total) or Pruitt (399 total) in the first and second Trump administrations, respectively. As such, even though both Pruitt's and Regan's EPAs issued 10 press releases with the current president's name in the title, these press releases constituted 2.5% of Pruitt's total releases, but less than 1% of Regan's. In total, in the first five months after Inauguration Day, EPA press releases that name "Obama," "Biden," or "Trump" in the title constitute 2.5% of releases under Pruitt, 1.69% of press releases under

Regan, and 10.7% of releases under Zeldin. These results show that Zeldin has focused on drawing attention to, and directly naming, Trump's predecessors in a more visible way than other administrations have in the past.

[illegible][illegible]

epa

administrator

superfund

cleanup

announces

funding

wildfire

national

harris

connecticut

violations

agency

action

drinking

days

provide

waste

takes

2025

coal

excellence

north

grant

river

regional

act

water

trump

across

leaders

review

completes

cleanups

reaches

texas

facilities

power

help

states

lead

across

actions

program

beach

wastewater

energy

public

sites

reduce

city

illinois

southeast

puerto

hazardous

carolina

long

celebrates

child

care

hold

visits

richo

communities

million

zeldin

grants

plan

site

50

day

new

air

chemical

state

former

infrastructure

michigan

partners

schools

support

settlement

administration

america

recovery

17

Additional exploration of EPA press releases that name a president in the title reveal qualitative differences as well. In terms of critiquing prior administrations, no press release titles issued in the first five months of the Pruitt-led EPA named Obama. Just one of the [Regan-led EPA's titles named Trump](#), characterizing a Trump-era rule as restrictive.

By comparison, **18 of Zeldin's EPA press release titles name Biden**, often with a critical tone. Several overlapping themes of criticism emerge. Zeldin repeatedly accuses Biden of 1) being corrupt and acting unlawfully; 2) acting in a wasteful, inefficient way with EPA funding; and 3) enacting policies that harm the American people, either through restricting access to products or an overly political agenda. For example, in a [February 2025 press release](#), Zeldin notes that Biden "weaponized energy efficiency rules to restrict consumer choice" when his administration promulgated WaterSense requirements for American appliances. This accusation was [repeated in a March press release](#) about the "Biden-Harris Electric Vehicle Mandate," which says the regulations take "away Americans' ability to choose a safe and affordable car for their family."

The press office also criticizes the previous EPA of engaging in corruption and waste. In February and March, secretly recorded statements were released of an EPA employee who discussed efforts by some staffers to pay out awarded grants after the election but before Trump took office. The employee described their actions as "[tossing gold bars off the Titanic](#)." Zeldin's press office issued numerous press releases in response, even going so far as to label the grants "[dark climate money](#)" and accusing the Biden administration of "[parking](#)" [grant money in outside banks](#) "[in a reckless attempt to avoid oversight](#)." The press office also shared Zeldin's comments to the *Free Beacon*, stating, without evidence, that "[we suspected that some organizations were created out of thin air just to take advantage of this](#)," and that "[well documented incidents of misconduct, conflicts of interest, and potential fraud raise significant concerns and pose unacceptable risk](#)." A later press release quoted Zeldin as calling [environmental justice work by the Biden administration](#) "an excuse to fund left-wing activists instead of actually spending those dollars to directly remediate environmental issues for those communities."

Zeldin also characterized the EPA museum as [“yet another example of waste by the Biden administration.”](#)

Zeldin’s press office frequently uses Biden’s alleged conduct or failures as a foil to praise either Zeldin, Trump, or the actions of the Trump administration. Where Biden restricted Americans’ choices in products, [Zeldin pushes for policies](#) that “best factor in effectiveness and consumer experience.” Where Biden wasted money frivolously, Zeldin “is [steadfast in his commitment to review agency spending line-by-line to ensure every penny spent is to advance clean air, land and water for all Americans.](#)” Zeldin press office [also notes that](#) the agency will, “in a transparent and accountable manner,” “work to re-obligate lawfully appropriated funds.” Where Biden was unlawful and corrupt, [Zeldin states that](#) his administration “follows the rule of law.” Where Biden “focus[ed] on ideological pursuits,” and left a “massive backlog of State Implementation Plans,” the [“Trump EPA’s goal is to clear this backlog as soon as possible.”](#) Meanwhile, a recent EDGI report shows, despite these claims, that [the Zeldin EPA in its early days has hit historic lows in productivity for the agency.](#)

Overall, this cursory analysis of press releases demonstrates that the Zeldin EPA is engaging in politically divisive language in ways that are unprecedented compared to recent predecessors. Zeldin’s press office vilifies Biden, portraying his administration as thoughtless, corrupt, and lawless, and contrasts this with language that depicts Trump and Zeldin as efficient, honest, and interested in the welfare of the environment and American people.

Conclusion

In this report, we conducted a preliminary investigation of early public-facing communications from Zeldin’s EPA. Our report was largely influenced by prior EDGI analyses revealing sensationalism, politicization, and [spin in press releases under the first Trump administration’s EPA.](#) We began by reviewing Zeldin’s experience with media relations before he took on his role at the EPA. Next, we focused on approximately the first five months of Trump’s second administration, examining EPA press releases, Zeldin’s Senate testimony, Op-Eds, and other materials. In the case of press titles, we compared the

first five months of this administration (presidential inauguration day through June 31 to the two prior presidential administrations.

Our report is structured around key themes of political gaslighting, as described by Stern and Brackett. We focused particularly on the ways Zeldin's communications sow confusion, division, and doubt. A review of Zeldin's "100 Days of Accomplishments" communication reveals that several of Zeldin's "accomplishments" are misleading or false. Further analyses of the "100 Days" communication highlight how Zeldin promoted contradictory information as it relates to EPA staffers, science, environmental justice, and climate change. Zeldin's Senate testimony and EPA press releases also reveal contradictions in his verbal commitments versus his actions as EPA administrator. Finally, a deeper dive into EPA press releases reveals that while most press releases are general in nature, a subset are politicized and stoke division by naming other presidents. Several op-eds by Administrator Zeldin also contain politically antagonistic messages.

While our report reveals parallels between political gaslighting and recent EPA communications under Zeldin, many questions remain. For example, the EPA also maintains an active social media presence. In future work, we hope to collect and analyze these data. We also hope to expand our analyses to explore additional themes.

Appendix

Table 2. List of 100 accomplishments in 100 Days (as released by Zeldin’s press office on April 30, 2025), with fact check performed by EDGI. Original 100 accomplishments found here:

<https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/100-days-100-environmental-accomplishments>.

Number	Description	Verified As:
1	Issued immediate action items for Mexico to permanently end the Tijuana River sewage crisis.	Correct
2	Responded quickly to a citizen complaint about discharges into New York’s Hutchinson River; inspected and ordered corrective action.	Correct
4	Finalized Arkansas 2022 Section 303(d) list assessing statewide water quality.	Correct
5	Approved Kansas Triennial Water Quality Standards Package.	Correct
6	Approved Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plan in South Dakota to protect Big Sioux River quality from E. coli.	False
8	Approved removal of the Drinking Water Beneficial Use Impairment in Wisconsin’s Green Bay and Fox River Area of Concern.	Correct
10	Completed Phase 1 hazardous materials clean up after the catastrophic Los Angeles wildfires. EPA cleared 13,612 residential properties and 305 commercial properties, and removed 645 electric and hybrid vehicles and 420 energy storage systems in under 30 days.	Misleading
15	Cut two years from the cleanup timeline at West Lake Landfill, a Superfund site in St. Louis, Missouri.	Misleading
22	Developed a method to detect 40 PFAS compounds in water sources.	False

Number	Description	Verified As:
25	Provided interim PFAS lab certification for Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC).	Correct
27	Started Final Remedial Actions for Jackson Ceramix Superfund in Falls Creek Borough, Pennsylvania, with construction to begin in the Spring of 2025.	Correct
34	Finalized air quality rulemaking in the Washington D.C. Area ensuring ozone compliance.	Misleading
36	Upgraded the RadNet monitoring station in Edison, New Jersey, to detect airborne radioactivity.	Misleading
42	Held a Superfund Job Training at Missouri's Ozark Correctional Center.	Correct
43	Completed review of 81 New Chemicals to ensure they are safe for human health and the environment.	Correct
45	Approved 48 pesticides to provide growers with necessary tools while ensuring appropriate restrictions were imposed to protect human health, the environment, and endangered species.	Correct
46	Proposed 35 significant new use rules (SNURs) for chemical oversight to ensure chemicals do not pose an unreasonable risk to human health or the environment.	Correct
47	Led a Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) Week-In-Residence Enforcement Training event for newly hired state inspectors to equip new inspectors with the knowledge necessary to uphold consistent inspection standards.	Correct
49	Announced approval of Texas's clean-air plan to address vehicle emissions and improve air quality in the San Antonio area.	Misleading
52	Sent mobile drinking water lab to flood-impacted Eastern Kentucky.	Correct

Number	Description	Verified As:
53	Cleared more than 1,700 orphan containers of oil, propane, and other hazardous materials from land and waterways around the French Broad River after Hurricane Helene.	Misleading
54	Tested over 1,500 private wells in North Carolina's Buncombe and Watauga counties.	Misleading
55	Assisted in restoring drinking water service to 150,000 people in North Carolina.	Misleading
59	Removed approximately 10,000 tons of soil and debris contaminated with asbestos containing material from an unsecured 10-acre property in Indiana.	Correct
60	Collaborated to replace lead-contaminated soil at Atlanta's Lindsay Street Park.	Correct
66	Started cleanup of radium-contaminated soil at the Silbert Watch Co. Superfund Site in Elgin, Illinois.	Correct
67	Developed EPA Method TO-15 to analyze 65 toxic Volatile Organic Compounds in indoor and outdoor air in support of Superfund and Clean Air Act.	False
68	Supported Los Alamos National Lab in transporting hazardous tritium containers for cleanup.	Misleading
69	Conducted lead contamination studies at the Bunker Hill Superfund site.	Correct
70	Completed the review of the Houston area Ozone Exceptional that allows the state to proceed with their Air Program planning and implementation.	False
71	Worked with U.S. Customs to stop illegal pesticide imports at multiple ports.	Correct
72	Blocked over 56,000 pounds of unregistered pesticide products from entering through Region 4 ports.	False

Number	Description	Verified As:
74	Cleanup of the HPI Chemical Products in Missouri, where thousands of containers of pesticide and herbicide containing hazardous substances, pollutants, and contaminants were housed.	Misleading
75	Began a Remedial Investigation of the Historic Potteries site in Trenton, New Jersey.	Misleading
77	Approved updated Comprehensive Conservation & Management plan for the Long Island Sound Partnership, to further restore and protect the Sound.	Correct
79	Oversaw cleanups at tribal and local jurisdictions under CERCLA and Clean Water Act.	Correct
80	Supported redevelopment at the Mississippi Phosphate Superfund site with a new treatment plant.	Correct
81	Completed analysis for wood treating contaminants at 181 residential properties around the Union Pacific Railroad Superfund site in Houston, Texas, with seventy four percent found to be safe for use.	Misleading
84	Obtained court settlement for cleanup work at the San Fernando Valley Superfund Site located in North Hollywood-Burbank to restore a critical drinking water supply for the city of Los Angeles.	False
85	Responded to hydraulic oil spill into a creek in Whitehouse, Ohio.	Correct
87	Began a removal action in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, to excavate and dispose of contaminated soil at three residential properties as part of a larger ongoing cleanup effort.	Correct
89	Finalized Native Green Grow Air Permit for large greenhouse facility in North Dakota, providing the Tribe with food security.	Misleading

Number	Description	Verified As:
90	Advanced Native American environmental oversight efforts.	Correct
91	Granted a Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan to Weber Basin Water Conservancy District, for drinking water infrastructure to over 20% of Utah's population while creating local jobs to support the projects.	Correct
92	Supported grant programs to monitor and clean up abandoned USTs.	Correct
93	Provided federal funds to conduct Highway 24 lead and arsenic clean up in Colorado.	Correct
95	Collaborated with fire rescue teams in North Carolina to retrieve containers from flooded rivers.	Correct
96	Provided technical guidance to local water operators, supporting efforts to restore and maintain drinking water systems and other essential services during Hurricane Helene Recovery efforts.	Correct
97	Completed all residential soil and indoor dust cleanup at the Colorado Smelter Superfund site.	Correct
98	Completed the 5-Year Review for Puerto Rico's Corozal Superfund Site, paving the way for its deletion from the CERCLA Superfund National Priority List.	Correct
99	Submitted a demand for information to a start-up company called "Make Sunsets," which is launching balloons filled with sulfur dioxide (SO2) seeking to geoengineer the planet and generate "cooling" credits to sell.	Correct
100	Announced major actions to combat PFAS contamination.	Misleading