In Washington, time doesn’t stand still—but the Trump administration is giving it a valiant effort.

This week, a federal judge in Rhode Island reminded America of a simple truth: Congress makes the laws. Presidents, no matter how bold or brash, don’t get to ignore them just because someone else passed them.

At issue is a quietly disruptive campaign by the Trump White House to halt billions in funding authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Both were centerpieces of President Biden’s domestic legacy—sprawling legislative achievements aimed at building roads, fighting climate change, and repairing the forgotten veins of America’s economy.

But to the new administration, those priorities belong to a bygone era. The Trump team has been pulling emergency brakes on projects already in motion—urban forestry, energy upgrades for the elderly, and lead poisoning prevention—effectively telling the winners of lawfully awarded federal grants: “Hang tight, we’re hitting pause indefinitely.”

Judge Mary McElroy, a Trump appointee no less, wasn’t amused. In a sweeping ruling, she slammed the administration for what amounts to an attempted bureaucratic freeze-frame—a move that lacked legal justification and, frankly, common sense. “Agencies do not have unfettered power to hamstring in perpetuity two statutes passed by Congress,” she wrote, and ordered an immediate thaw.

For those watching this legal saga unfold, the irony has been rich. The Trump administration—which once railed against “deep state” overreach—now seeks to use that very machinery to delay Congress’s will. Meanwhile, the plaintiffs in the case—community nonprofits and conservation groups—had to argue for the rights not granted by contracts, but by *laws*. The difference matters. Congress doesn’t award policy victories as suggestions. It passes statutes. They carry force.

The administration’s defense leaned on a lofty interpretation of executive authority, and, in a twist of judicial déjà vu, cited a narrow Supreme Court decision that dismissed a separate grant-related case on a technicality. But Judge McElroy didn’t

bite. Emergency decisions don’t erase decades of precedent, she said. Bravo.

This ruling is about more than a few million dollars for tree-planting and housing retrofits. It’s about how power is wielded after a transition. When administrations change, so do priorities. That’s democracy. But what we’re witnessing is something else: an attempt to retroactively *rewrite* history by freezing its consequences.

It’s tempting, in the era of political whiplash, to see every court decision as a partisan chess move. But this one cuts across ideology. It’s a lesson in restraint. Presidents are entitled to agendas. What they’re not entitled to is erasing the legislature’s work because it doesn’t align with the mood of the moment.

If the Trump administration wants to reshape infrastructure or climate spending, there’s a proper avenue: pass new laws. Convince Congress. Make your case to the American people. What you cannot do is slam the brakes on programs midstream and expect no judicial consequences.

Judge McElroy’s ruling restores more than funding. It restores faith in the basic machinery of governance. And for that, no court order could be more timely.