NEWSLETTER *Published October 24, 2025 • 9 minute read*

On the Grid: A FOAK in the Road

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Hi Friend!

Welcome back to *On the Grid*, Third Way's bi-weekly newsletter, where we'll recap how we're working to deploy every clean energy technology as quickly and affordably as possible.

We're excited to have you join us!

This week, Google announced a corporate power-purchase agreement (PPA) to help fuel its data centers in the Midwest with power from a new 400 MW natural gas plant. The plant, located in Decatur, Illinois, will capture and store its carbon emissions, marking the first commercial-scale gas-fired power plant with integrated carbon capture in the US.

The project is actually a pathbreaker on multiple fronts:

1. **First-of-a-Kind Build:** Unlike the retrofits we've seen on existing natural gas plants, this plant is a brand new build, designed from the ground up with carbon capture in mind. New builds enable higher capture rates, lower operating costs, and need less energy to operate for the carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) system. Basically, they're more efficient by every measure.

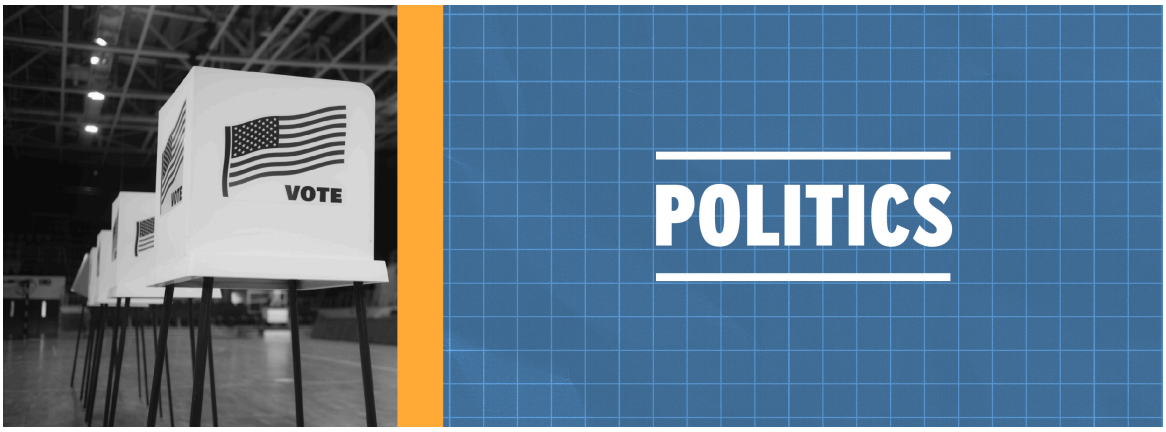
2. **First-of-a-Kind Deal:** This is the first time a hyperscaler has signed a PPA for a carbon-capturing gas plant, representing a quiet recalibration. Big companies know that their energy demand curves are growing faster than the grid can handle, and they're rethinking where they're going to get the energy they need.

3. **Serious Community Benefits:** Broadwing Energy, which will capture and permanently store the plant's emissions, expects the project to deliver about $1 billion in economic impact across Decatur, Macon County, and the surrounding communities. Construction will support 650 union craft and 100 construction workers over four years, and the completed plant will sustain 30 full-time, well-paying permanent positions.

Why This Matters: Hyperscalers are confronting a simple math problem: data centers are on track to use twice as much energy by the end of the decade as they do today, primarily driven by AI, and, as we've noted in previous issues, the grid doesn't yet have enough supply to meet that demand. Google's announcement signals a shift in how big tech companies plan to close that gap. Instead of turning to only renewables or just unmitigated natural gas, the company is investing in front-of-the-meter firm power paired with carbon capture to provide steady, around-the-clock electricity.

The project developer, Low Carbon Infrastructure, will do the heavy lifting–building and operating the plant and managing the carbon-capture system–while Google simply commits to buying the electricity. It's a model that balances rising demand pressures with pragmatism: securing clean, reliable power without taking on the full project risk.

What We're Doing: This announcement is a reminder that meeting America's growing energy demand will take more of everything–more renewables, more nuclear, and *yes*, more natural gas paired with carbon capture. Third Way has long championed an all-of-the-above approach to building a reliable and affordable energy system, and we've worked with companies like Google over the years to advance innovation and carbon management solutions that support that vision. From fission to fusion to their 24/7 clean energy commitments, Google has consistently explored how to pair emerging technologies with real-world deployment–and this new project is the latest example of that approach in action.



Household electricity prices continue to increase, largely due to the cost of updating and maintaining an aging power grid facing growing demand from electrification, a manufacturing boom, and, as we noted above, a surge of data centers coming online. Americans are facing higher household energy bills and looking for relief.

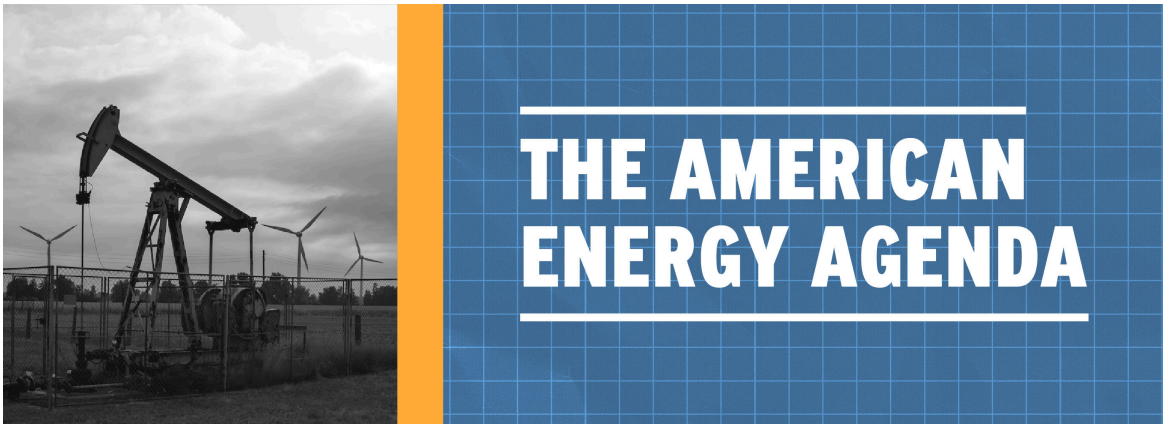
As we've noted in the past, Democrats have talked about energy as an environmental issue, rather than an economic necessity. The result is a self-induced image problem: voters don't believe Democrats care about energy affordability. They see Democratic policymakers as only interested in 'green' energy, and they don't trust Dems to take action to lower household costs. This isn't just a messaging issue; it's a credibility crisis.

Why This Matters: Democrats are finally beginning to pull ahead of Republicans on affordability issues, but that margin is thin and precarious. Historically, Democrats have been seen as less equipped to address economic issues than Republicans, and that dynamic long predates Biden, Harris, and Trump. To protect and grow whatever trust they've built with voters, Democratic policymakers need to provide concrete policy ideas and disciplined messaging on affordable energy, not climate progress.

Clean energy IS affordable, reliable, and, given the backlog for natural gas turbines, faster to deploy to meet rapidly growing energy demand. But voters don't know that—they only associate clean energy with environmental benefit. As Democrats work to establish their economic credibility, they also need to grow clean energy's credibility and make the case to voters that these technologies cut costs, not just emissions.

What We're Doing: Polling shows that when Democrats frame energy as a pocketbook issue, voters respond positively. But when they lead with climate, support for clean energy policies drops, especially among the working-class voters who are already skeptical that climate action helps them personally. This tells us that the barrier isn't opposition to clean energy, it's how we talk about it. Our newest memo lays out clear examples of what works–pragmatic, affordability-focused messages–and what doesn't.

Moving forward, we're growing our research and communications efforts on affordability and helping clean energy advocates make the case that clean = affordable, reliable, and effective. Stay tuned for more survey results from our public opinion team and, if you've got specific questions, drop me a line.



The Trump Administration has spent months waging an aggressive campaign against renewable energy—rolling back clean energy tax credits, mocking wind turbines as *"pathetic,"* and now, is considering canceling hundreds of clean energy grants. For those curious–our newest timeline outlines 23 specific executive orders, agency rule makings, and administrative decisions that have directly undermined our wind and solar industries.

The past year has been a sobering reminder that clean energy progress is vulnerable—and certainly not guaranteed. However, in some parts of the US, states are continuing to do the hard work to make clean energy real and lasting.

To better understand the dynamics on the ground, Third Way partnered with former Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small (NM-02) to speak directly with the people living and working around two of the country's largest renewable projects: SunZia Wind and Western Spirit Wind. You can read our full memo here, but here are a few things we'd recommend:

1. Stable rules and streamlined processes that actually work, not endless red tape, and real engagement with tribal nations and local communities.

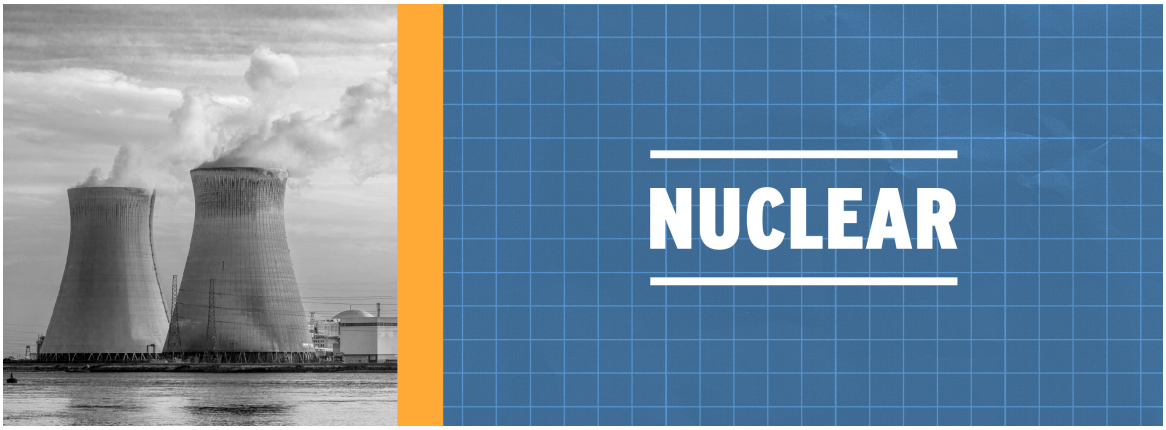
2. Benefits people can see! To build durable support for clean energy projects, developers must front-load the value by investing locally, creating lasting jobs, and making sure communities feel the tangible advantages as they bear any disruptions.

3. Training and hiring pipelines must guarantee that new clean energy jobs *actually* go to the people living in the surrounding communities.

4. And finally, big projects need consistent signals from state and federal leaders to lower risk and unlock investment.

What We're Doing: The lessons we've learned from New Mexico are clear: the future of clean energy depends on delivering visible benefits for communities and stable policy for developers. Right now, as the Administration continues to cancel clean energy projects, often without any explanation, our team is working with former Department of Energy officials, NGOs, and Hill staff to rebuild that trust by helping developers and communities navigate the fallout from ongoing federal project cancellations.

If you know of any awardees affected by these cancellations or who have received a termination notice, direct them to Lawyers for Good Government, who can connect them to free technical, strategy, and communications assistance.



Russia and China are dominating the global nuclear industry. They're building and financing reactors across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, often bundling them with training, fuel supply, and waste handling, and locking in decades of geopolitical leverage.

Both Beijing and Moscow understand something the US has been slow to internalize: energy policy *is* foreign policy. And while the US has made considerable progress at home—with major nuclear agreements emerging from companies like Google and Amazon—the country is still moving far too cautiously in the global marketplace and with no centralized strategy.

Russia and China are currently writing the rules of the global nuclear market. If we want to reshape the future of global energy, then we have to start acting like a country that still builds.

What We're Doing: Our team has long emphasized that nuclear energy is central to American energy security and foreign policy. Earlier this year, we released a joint report with Stonehaven, outlining a roadmap for a formal US-UK civil nuclear bilateral agreement to deepen cooperation and reduce costs on both sides of the Atlantic. The framework helped lay the foundation for the *Atlantic Partnership for Advanced Nuclear Energy,* the first bilateral trade agreement with nuclear reactors at the center.

Last month, at the Warsaw Security Forum, we expanded on that effort with a new report, in partnership with Stonehaven and Project Tempo, that outlined a trilateral framework for the US, UK, and Poland to deploy new reactors and secure supply chains. US civil nuclear partnerships aren't just about exporting technology–it's about shared opportunity. Unlike Russia and China's state-led models, which lock countries into dependency, a US-led approach enables partners to own parts of the shared supply chain, build their own manufacturing capacity, strengthen their local workforces, and contribute to global nonproliferation standards.

Why This Matters: The question is no longer whether the world will want more nuclear plants—it's about who will actually build them. China has a national mandate and a predictable strategy, and is building reactors twice as fast as Western nations. The US, on the other hand, is faltering. While we have the innovation, the investment, and capable partners like the UK and Poland. But we still lack a cohesive, whole-of-government strategy for nuclear energy.

As Brad Plumer and Harry Stevens note in the *New York Times* this week, we're "betting too heavily on technological breakthroughs instead of focusing on the financing, skills, and infrastructure needed to build plants." In the global nuclear race, leadership won't go to the country that talks the loudest; it'll go to the one that actually builds.

The clean energy policy conversation is expanding...and so are we! The Climate and Energy Program is looking for people with talent and a passion for climate solutions to fill three new roles on our

team.

- Executive Coordinator

- Philanthropy Associate

- The *New York Times* Editorial Board argues that, despite political conversations being dominated by ideological extremes, both Democrats and Republicans win more elections when they nominate candidates closer to the center.

- Kate Yonder, in *Grist*, notes the rhetoric shift around climate change and outlines best practices for reaching voters.

- Bill Loveless, on the *Columbia Energy Exchange* podcast, speaks with Jason Bordoff and Meghan O'Sullivan about the resurgence of energy as a coercive tool of statecraft, driven by the clean energy transition, and the impact on how the US thinks about energy security.