NEWSLETTER *Published May 29, 2026 · 7 minute read*

On the Grid: Fuel Me Once

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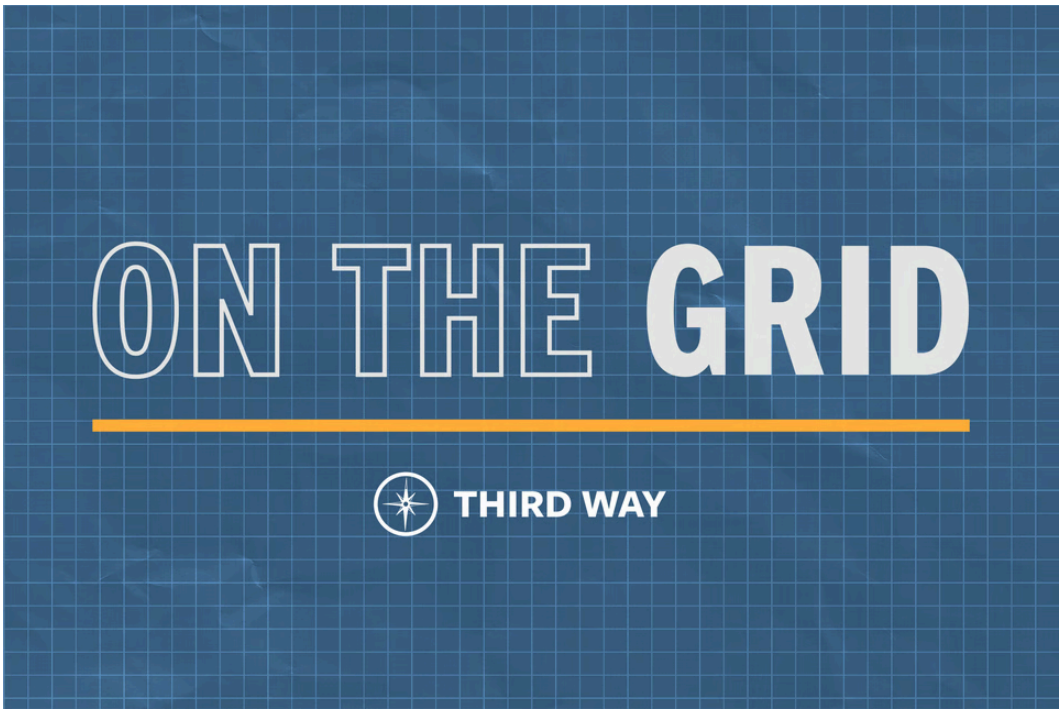
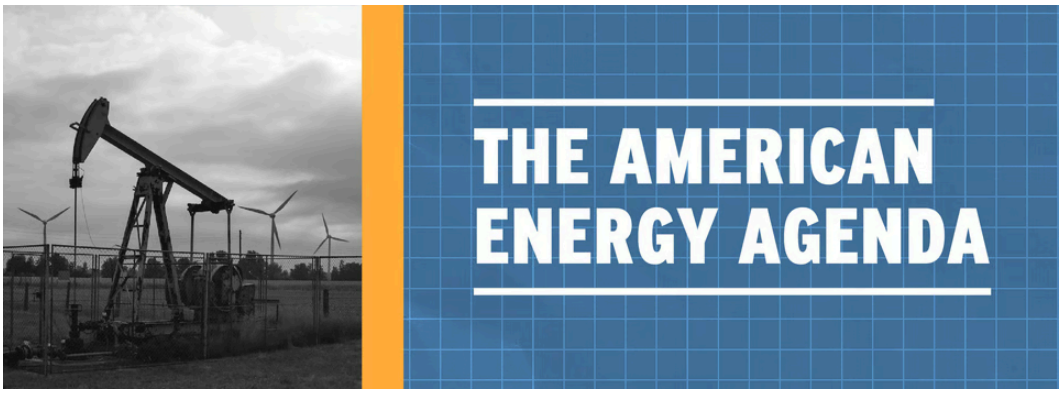


Hi Friend!

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!



As electricity prices nationwide continue to surge, policymakers are seeking strategies to mitigate price spikes and ensure continued reliability and affordability for residential customers. Doing so requires grappling with an aging grid straining under surging demand from hyperscalers, reshored factories, and a rapidly electrifying economy. It also means navigating the challenges of volatile natural gas prices.

At Third Way, we've spent the past several months unpacking the cause of rising energy prices and digging into the challenges policymakers face as they work to ease the burden on American families. Below, we unpack the difficult task ahead for policymakers, consider the causes of rising energy bills, and explore what it takes to cut costs for working people.

Setting the RECORD Straight: Last year, Third Way launched Project RECORD (Rapid response to Energy cuts, Outages, Rising prices, and Demand growth), a paid and earned media campaign across six states, focused on growing Americans' understanding that clean energy is cheap, plentiful, and reliable. The project is designed to strengthen Americans' support for clean energy, which, though widespread, isn't particularly pronounced. Americans still vote in droves for anti-clean-energy politicians, oppose clean energy projects in their communities, and view clean energy as a "nice to have" environmental good rather than an economic necessity.

Project RECORD uses a strategic media campaign to strengthen support for clean energy technologies and public opinion research to measure Americans' responses. Operating in

New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maine, RECORD also includes a robust analysis of the states' electricity markets and examines the root causes behind rising bills.

Finding Commonalities: Our analysis identifies shared drivers of rising prices across our target states: an aging grid, growing energy demand, and volatile natural gas prices. This last problem is particularly thorny for policymakers. As we've written before, gas will remain a part of America's energy sector for years to come, even under the most ambitious clean energy timelines. But the cost of gas fluctuates considerably from month to month and year to year, and nothing, not even the US's vast natural gas production, can fully insulate American consumers from price volatility.

Everything from a cold snap or pipeline constraint in the Northeast can drive up electricity prices in places like Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Over time, the most durable hedge against that kind of volatility is a more diversified energy mix–one that relies more heavily on technologies like nuclear, geothermal, wind, solar, and storage, alongside natural gas, rather than allowing a single fuel source to dominate our grid.

The Reality of Rising Prices: In Central Ohio, for example, where natural gas plays a dominant role in the regional PJM grid, electricity prices have jumped almost 50% in five years.

Meanwhile, lower marginal-cost resources, like wind and solar, still make up less than 5% of PJM's overall energy mix. At the same time, PJM is sitting on a massive interconnection backlog–200,000 MW of new generation waiting to be connected–much of which is low-cost solar and battery storage.

In the Northeast, Massachusetts residents have seen electricity rates climb 70% higher over the past decade–nearly double the national rate over the same period–driven, in part, by the regional grid's deep dependence on natural gas.

Even major gas-producing states, like Pennsylvania, are not insulated from these dynamics. Abundance alone does not automatically translate into price stability.

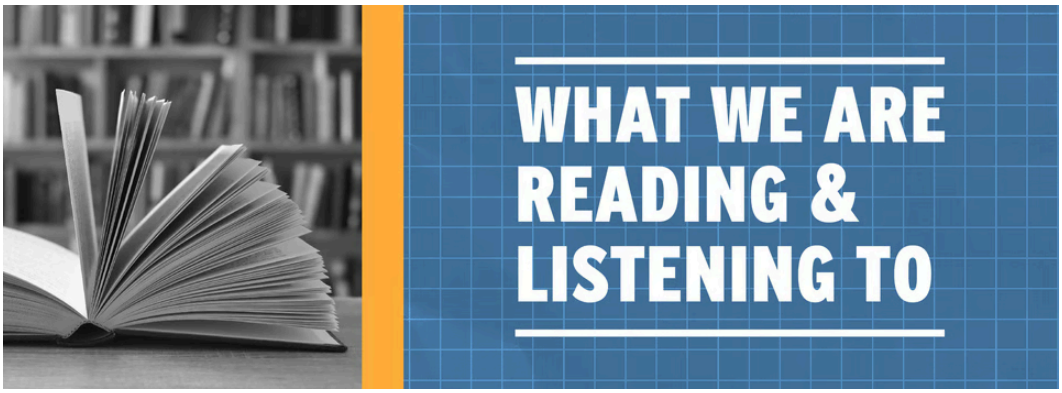
The Political Element: Affordability has been on the ballot for some time, but energy didn't take on serious political salience until November 2025, when rising energy costs in the PJM interconnection played a central role in Virginia and New Jersey's gubernatorial races. Governors Spanberger and Sherrill both won their races by messaging on energy affordability and laying out plans for short-term relief and long-term solutions to rising costs. Candidates in the 2026 midterms – and the 2028 presidential race – will need to present their own plans to stop skyrocketing prices and preserve reliable service.

What Voters Are Looking For: Much of the political discourse on energy has focused on a binary argument about fossil fuels: should they be eliminated entirely or embraced completely? The reality is more nuanced. When Americans think about energy, they prioritize three things: affordability, reliability, and energy independence. And when you ask them about their ideal energy mix for their communities, an overwhelming majority favor some combination of clean energy and fossil fuels. And a majority *do* want action on climate change–they just don't prioritize it above other issues like affordability. This dynamic prompts a number of challenging questions policymakers must answer in the months ahead:

1. How do we protect affordability while continuing to reduce emissions? How do we balance the need for continued access to cheap natural gas with the importance of clean energy deployment?
2. How do we approach new gas infrastructure projects? Should the US continue to expand natural gas infrastructure? If so, how can we do so quickly, without rubber-stamping projects that may carry environmental risk? What is a framework that treats gas buildout as a bridge with a clear endpoint?
3. How do you build more transmission and clean generation fast enough to meaningfully reduce the impact of fossil fuel volatility?
4. How do we further grow clean energy deployment in the US, given ongoing Chinese dominance in many essential supply chains?
5. How do we grow community acceptance of clean energy and counter NIMBYism that blocks the deployment of vital projects?
6. Lastly–and this one's a doozy–how do we make the case that building more clean energy will make energy more affordable, even though it's profoundly unlikely that energy prices will decrease in nominal terms? If prices keep climbing, albeit at a slower rate, will voters feel any relief?

What We're Doing: A grid that relies more heavily on fixed-cost generation–nuclear, geothermal, and renewables–alongside storage and natural gas is structurally less exposed to fuel shocks over time than one where natural gas is the dominant player. Through efforts like Project RECORD and our broader public opinion research, our team has been working to better understand how voters in key states are actually thinking about affordability, reliability, clean energy, and rising electricity prices. By deploying paid and earned media campaigns across competitive districts, our team is learning. We're working to develop effective policy solutions and resonant messages that tackle the questions above and help policymakers navigate the minefield that is the present day energy sector.

The clean energy 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 a new role on our team: Senior Policy Advisor, Electricity. Please share this opportunity with your network!



- Henry Grabar, in *The Atlantic*, argues that a gas-tax pause would do little to reduce prices at the pump for consumers, while worsening the long-term funding issues for highways and broader transit infrastructure.
- Justin Worland, in *TIME*, highlights how climate policy in Singapore is increasingly framed not as a moral appeal or an environmental necessity, but as a pragmatic response to concerns about energy security, economic resilience, and competitiveness in the region, positioning Singapore's approach as a potential model for the future of climate policy.
- Rob Meyer, on *Heatmap's Shift Key* podcast, chats with Josh Parker, head of sustainability at Nvidia, to discuss the climate and electricity impacts of AI and how AI can help cut emissions in our power grid.