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On The Grid: The Center Holds

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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!



PERMITTING

For much of Third Way's existence, we have seen developers struggle to secure the financing they need to deploy clean energy technologies, like wind, solar, and nuclear. In the past few years, that has radically changed: even with recent reversals on federal grants and loans for new clean energy projects, investment in clean technologies continues to break records. The markets want clean energy, and developers have a much easier time funding their projects. But projects still slow, stall, and fail.

Third Way partnered with Environmental Resources Management to understand the non-cost barriers blocking clean energy deployment. Together, we conducted a comprehensive survey of over 200 clean energy professionals across the solar and transmission industries. The full report and detailed findings are here, but here are the toplines:

1. More than 70% of survey respondents said federal permitting caused longer delays than state or local permitting processes. Respondents reported selecting project locations to minimize the number of federal permits needed to move forward.
2. An overwhelming majority of respondents pointed to the National Environmental Policy Act as the most burdensome phase of federal permitting.
3. Contrary to popular belief, local opposition rarely stops or slows projects. It certainly exists, but only a small number of respondents reported encountering enough community resistance to cause real delays.
4. Over half of respondents listed interconnection as the most common cause of project delays.

Why This Matters: America's institutions aren't fast, efficient, or agile enough to match the scale of our energy needs. Clean energy is now cheap, but too difficult to build. And the biggest bottlenecks are squarely within the *federal* government's control and can't be solved by state action alone. With electricity demand and prices skyrocketing, the US must untangle this mess.

What We're Doing: Our new research provides a clear picture of what's holding projects back. We're now focusing on advancing an ambitious solutions agenda. This includes limiting when federal or

state agencies can rescind or revise environmental authorizations without clear justification, encouraging proactive transmission planning, and expanding the use of advanced grid technologies. This will require uncomfortable trade-offs to make real change, including to NEPA.



For the first time in memory, electricity prices played a decisive role in election results on Tuesday, November 4, and pragmatic, all-of-the-above energy strategies helped many candidates over the finish line. In key statewide elections in Virginia, New Jersey, and Georgia, Democratic candidates honed in on electricity affordability, embracing all-of-the-above energy and offering practical solutions.

The Role of Energy Prices: Residential electricity prices increased by 10% nationwide this year. It's even more stark in New Jersey, where prices jumped 21%, and Virginia, where they rose 13%. Democratic candidates zeroed in on this, offering clear steps they would take to combat rising prices and making the case that clean energy *is* affordable.

The Policy Solutions: In Virginia, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Abigail Spanberger outlined a pragmatic "Affordable Virginia Plan" to expand local generation through a diverse mix of technologies, enhance energy-efficiency programs, modernize the grid, and require data centers that drive up demand to help fund the necessary infrastructure upgrades to maintain reliable power. She consistently pointed to the Trump administration's actions, notably its withdrawal from Norfolk's wind project, as proof that those policies directly raise prices and stall local job growth.

In the New Jersey governor's race, Democrat Mickie Sherrill struck a similar note, putting affordability at the center of her campaign. She pledged to declare a state of emergency on utility costs and freeze rates for a year to give families breathing room while New Jersey accelerates its clean energy buildout. Like Spanberger, she drew a sharp contrast with her Republican opponent's embrace of the Trump agenda, calling out his administration for policies that would raise household energy costs and jeopardize local projects.

As Josh Freed, Senior Vice President for Third Way's Climate and Energy Program, told Politico this week, "*The party that controls Washington promised a year ago to cut energy prices in half. They have*

failed to deliver, and voters are angry at that. They made that loud and clear basically in every county and every state that had elections."

What's Next: This week's results are an early indicator of how the economy will be at the center of the 2026 and 2028 elections. Until prices come down relative to people's weekly paychecks, affordability is going to dominate the conversation. Candidates need strategies to cut costs for working people. And while campaigning on lowering prices is easy, actually doing it is much harder.

Those of us who work in energy know that the problems driving costs—aging infrastructure, slow permitting, interconnection bottlenecks, and regulatory inertia—don't fit neatly into campaign slogans. They're often technical, bureaucratic, and hard to fix quickly. But they're also solvable. The challenge for policymakers is to turn political momentum into delivery, making it faster, cheaper, and easier to build the infrastructure that actually lowers prices. We're already working with a number of Governors on pragmatic affordability policies, and will bring together the best ideas to help create and enact a broader, bold agenda.



- [Tyler Norris](#), in the *New York Times*, outlines how data centers and AI are increasingly placing pressure on our grid and makes the case for policy solutions to ensure ratepayers don't shoulder the financial burden of rising demand.
- [Mark Gongloff](#), in *Bloomberg*, argues that while public debate over climate change remains overly politicized, the stock market is placing major bets on clean technologies, with the S&P Global Clean Energy Index outperforming other broad market indices in 2025.
- [Ed Crooks](#), on the *Energy Gang* podcast, speaks with various allies and industry leaders at the ACORE Grid Forum in Washington, DC, navigating several conversations around how the US can quickly expand and modernize its electrical grid.