

Joe Biden is about to vanish from the political scene, but not from the history books. The last election casts a pall on his reputation, as does his unpopularity. But history may be kinder, as it has been for Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter. Beyond all else, he has been our best president yet on climate policy. For our descendants, that will matter a lot more than a couple of years of inflation that impacted their ancestors. Like many people, I think he should have quit the 2024 presidential race much earlier, but that mistake should distract our attention from his major achievement in office.

Foremost, of course, was the trio of climate funding bills passed under Biden. The first of the three was the Bipartisan Infrastructure act, which included over \$100 billion for mass transit and rail, along with \$65 billion to expand the capacity of the nation's electrical transmission system. The second law, the CHIPS Act was focused on the semiconductor and computing sectors, but it also had extensive provisions relating to energy and climate. It provided major support for energy research and commercializing innovative technologies. Both laws had bipartisan support.

But these laws were eclipsed by the climate provisions of the third law, the Inflation Reduction Act, which passed on a party line vote. While it is difficult to summarize such a lengthy piece of legislation in a few sentences, the *Washington Post* managed a pithy overview of a few key portions, "On climate change, the bill includes \$161 billion in new tax credits to incentivize clean electricity and about \$80 billion to encourage consumers to purchase new or used electric vehicles and improve the energy efficiency of their homes. It also provides \$1.5 billion to cut emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas." The IRA also includes substantial tax credits, which could be as high as three or four times the initial estimate, depending on the extent of clean technology adoption, but would be cost-justified even at that level. Trump and other Republicans have made noises about repealing these laws, but it seems likely that any cutbacks will only be incremental.

Those three laws will stand as Biden's signature achievements, but other environmental actions will also be remembered. Biden's EPA was also very active, though it seems likely that Trump will undo much of its work. Still, EPA did lay down some markers about the technological changes that are in the offing for transportation and power plants using fossil fuels. When the political wheel turns, and EPA is again able to function normally, industry knows what's coming down the pike. Biden was also busy on the international level. This is not my area of expertise, but Biden obviously made it clear that the U.S. was back in the game after the first four years of Trump.

People talk about Supreme Court appointments as a President's longest-lasting legacy. Not so. Justices last a few decades. Carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for centuries,

warming the earth every single day. Those emissions — or reductions in those emissions — are the most permanent impact that Presidents leave behind. Biden will be ranked highly on that basis. He has a lot to feel proud of.