

It's no secret that this is a dark time for people who care about the environment. The Trump Administration and the Republican Congress have converged on the goal of boosting fossil fuels. Their solution to the environmental harms caused by these fuels is to deny the seriousness of climate change, weaken air pollution regulations, and upend protections for ecosystems and endangered species. In short, we are digging ourselves deeper into a hole.

Although these are dark times, we still have some real strengths. Wind and solar are now cheaper than gas or coal electricity generation. The cost of battery storage is continuing to dive, and with it the cost of electric vehicles, while battery performance is constantly improving.

There is a limit to how long the government can ignore these economic and technological realities. For instance, it seems clear that solar and wind will continue to grow sharply as data centers proliferate. The alternatives are either completely uneconomical (new coal plants), involve permitting and construction delays (nuclear reactors), or have multi-year backlogs for key equipment (natural gas plants). The only way to ramp up quickly will be renewable energy, especially solar.

Moreover, despite the political climate in Washington, state governments representing about half the U.S. population are committed to cutting carbon emissions. Trump can make some of this more difficult, but he can't command the states to obey as will.

At the end of environmental law courses, I used to tell students about the role they could play over the course of their careers in fixing environmental problems. But avoiding a climate disaster isn't something today's students can plan on tackling "over the course of their careers." The most critical time will be the next fifteen years, which means you'll need to get to work quickly.

You'll be graduating after Trump leaves office, a transition that hopefully will create space for constructive environmental action. The most obvious ways you can contribute as a lawyer are as an environmental or energy lawyer. But there's a lot that needs to be done beyond those areas:

Business Law. There will have to be corporate planning to cut emissions, and climate-related disclosure requirements. Businesses are keeping a low profile but they haven't necessarily changed their goals. Small businesses are going to be in special need of help to work their way through regulatory requirements.

Land use law. There will have to be changes in land use laws to limit sprawl and support

public transit. There will have to be changes in building codes to require electrification and energy efficiency.

International Law. Obviously, there will also be a lot to do in the international sphere.

Social Justice Law. Someone is going to have to represent disadvantaged communities to make sure they aren't left behind or overburdened. Yes, Trump thinks we shouldn't worry about that, but I doubt he can silence those communities indefinitely.

This isn't going to be easy. It's going to take iron determination and creativity to find ways to make progress. The determination has to come from you, but we're here to equip you to search out and implement innovative solutions. Later generations aren't going to accept as an excuse that we got discouraged because problems seemed too hard to solve.

Those of us who have been around longer aren't going to be able to just pass the baton to you. There isn't enough time for you to take on the problem alone. We're all going to have to work ever harder to make change happen.

What we do together between now and 2035 will determine what your lives look like in 2050 and 2080, and what your children and grandchildren will see in the next century. So grab your books, get yourselves ready, and be prepared to head for the trenches when you graduate. No time to waste!