

There were a number of efforts by [wealthy individuals](#) and/or [Super PACs](#) to affect the midterm election results. Most relevant to this blog, Tom Steyer used [tens of millions of his own funds to support candidates that he felt would be more supportive of efforts to address climate change](#).

After the election, the media portrayed Steyer's efforts as a [waste of money](#): Only a small minority of the candidates Steyer supported were elected, and his efforts to get "climate-friendly" majorities elected in the Washington state legislature were unsuccessful.

There's been some pushback on whether Steyer really wasted his money. The argument is that he forced candidates to talk about, and [take positions on, energy and climate change issues](#), and that is progress.

I'd have to say that I agree with both critiques. It is good to climate change on the agenda. But I also think that Steyer's money could have been better spent.

How? It's not enough - or it's the wrong approach - to focus on simply trying to get the right people elected. It might be far more effective to identify policies that can be enacted now that will make it more likely that the right people will be elected in the future - or that even the "wrong" people still do the right thing. For instance, subsidies for distributed solar in [Arizona](#) and [North Carolina](#) have made it politically difficult for even very conservative state legislatures and agencies to roll back clean energy policy. The long history of energy and environmental policy in California meant that the [voters rejected efforts to repeal the state's landmark climate change regulatory statute](#). (This [book](#) does a great job of identifying similar examples in other countries.)

So here's a suggestion for how Steyer might want to spend at least a little bit of his money in the future: Identify policies that can help build political and economic coalitions for climate change action in the future; identify which of those policies are politically feasible and effective at the state level; and then mobilize lobbyists and support to get those policies enacted, regardless of who is in charge at the moment in the legislature. This would take only a fraction of the resources that Steyer put into television ads. But it might payoff a lot more over time.