The U.S. has a democracy deficit. Winning national majorities isn't enough to get majorities in Congress. This creates headwinds against climate action. In the short-run at least, legislative earmarks might be one way to overcome the problem.

The House is already planning to bring back earmarks, but the the heart of the problem is the Senate. In the Senate, all states — not all people — are created equal. States with higher rural, white populations get two Senators, same as more diverse and urbanized states. In effect, the demographics who are least likely to favor climate action get extra voting power.

The undemocratic nature of the Senate has always been a problem, but today the differences in state voting power are really stark. Wyoming has a population of 580,000, a little more than Fresno. It elects the same number of Senators as California's 40 million. To have equal representation, Californians would need 138 Senators. And Wyoming's population heavily skews white and rural compared to the nation as a whole, let alone California.

This doesn't mean that climate action is impossible, but it does stack the deck against climate legislation. The problem is partly that the same demographics favor the Republican party, which at present does not officially acknowledge any need for climate action. But even Democrats from these white, rural states are likely to favor less climate action than the nation as a whole might prefer.

In the long run, something more dramatic might be needed to make the Senate more representative of the country as a whole — for instance, statehood for D.C. and Puerto Rico. A constitutional amendment would be the ideal solution, but that would require agreement from the same states that currently benefit from disproportionate representation.

There's another idea worth considering, at least as a short-term measure. Current legislative practices make it difficult to do earmarks, directing funding to particular projects. (Look here for an explanation.) It may be possible to win over Senators from these rural states by rewarding them with projects. Ideally, those projects themselves would help advance sustainability, such as renewable energy installations or clean energy research facilities.

Earmarks may sound crass, but they're how things often got done in Congress back when things actually *did* get done in Congress. And if we waste a little government money in the process, that may be the price of progress.