Governors of two of the largest U.S. states have made the calculation that the "freedom" to choose not to wear a mask is more important than public health. Their orders – precluding schools from requiring masks for students and teachers – will almost certainly result in significant increases in disease and even death. Theirs is a profoundly cynical calculus that political benefits from anti-masking orders will be greater than political risks from impacts on public health. (Under California Law, in case you were wondering, both the Governor and local governments have extensive authority to declare public health emergencies under the Emergency Services Act, and it seems unlikely that the Governor can overrule a local emergency determination, although there are constraints on those determinations).

What does this have to do with climate change?

If Governors, who actually acknowledge the existence of COVID, and the public can see the ravages of the disease on a daily basis, see political gain in voiding actions to protect the public health, how can we expect meaningful action on climate change, which is still subject of disparagement by an entire political party and which has a more attenuated connection to human suffering than a daily deadly disease? If politicians are this cynical about COVID, we can hardly expect better on climate. Congressional inaction certainly reflects that reality.

So, what is to be done?

I offer a few paths forward. First, climate deniers and delayers have to be voted out of office because of their denial and delay. If there is no political jeopardy, political action will be very hard. Second, having said that, the Biden Administration is focusing the federal government on climate action, and in conjunction with Democrats in Congress, focusing the budget on climate response. These are very real steps and should not be discounted. Third, California and other states are moving forward with more aggressive action, and by doing so are improving markets and pricing for new technology and industries, like wind and solar.

All good, but what else? Here are a couple of suggestions.

California has multiple overall climate goals and targets, many of them world-leading (including for carbon neutrality and reduction of short-lived climate pollutants). But it has often had the most impact when it has focused on very specific actions. Governor Schwarzenegger had a million solar roofs. He and

Governor Brown lead initiatives from the Governor's Office to streamline siting and permitting for large-scale solar projects. Jerry Brown sponsored legislation to require procurement of energy storage. Governor Newsom could have a worldwide impact by setting specific goals and providing Governor's office resources for specific actions, such as offshore wind, large-scale energy storage, or electric-vehicle charging infrastructure. Any of those would impact markets, industries, and technologies and ripple across the world.

Philanthropies play an important role in climate action, and have funded hundreds of initiatives. But what if one or two of the largest – take your pick: Gates, MacArthur, Hewlett, etc. – decided to spend fully 50 percent of their annual giving for five years on one single topic area? My pick would be methane emissions (and I will say why – again – tomorrow). We need this level of focus to make greater progress faster.

And what if Facebook or Apple or any of a dozen other huge companies committed 5 percent of their profits for five years to climate solutions? Again, I would start with methane.

We are at a point where we need sustained, focused, serious commitment, otherwise we will not overcome cynical political calculus that will keep deniers and delayers in political power.