

If the candidates running to be California's next governor want a prepackaged idea for how to reduce pollution while making energy more affordable in 2026, here's one that has been hiding in plain sight. Make a modernization plan to direct money for electrification that is currently being diverted unnecessarily into aging gas infrastructure.

But don't take my word for it, read my UCLA colleagues who just last week put out a detailed report called "Go Big, Save Big" about how to fund the transition to electrification.

As California struggles to electrify, we keep pouring money into aging natural gas infrastructure that locks us all into more expensive homes. That's money that could instead be going to upgrading entire neighborhoods and slashing bills across the state.

Any business knows that maintaining two duplicative systems makes little financial sense but just think about it from a home economic standpoint: If you've recently bought an electric hot water kettle to make tea and coffee super-fast, you don't also buy a brand-new pot to make coffee on your gas stove. It's become obsolete. You

drop it off at a Goodwill and move on with your life.

The recommendations from the report's authors **Denise Grab** and **Craig Segall** are mostly directed at state agencies like the CPUC and CARB, but there are great tips for the slate of gubernatorial candidates too. It's a big problem that the candidates, even longtime climate philanthropist Tom Steyer, don't want to talk about climate change, writes **Sammy Roth** at Climate Colored Goggles. But they are all eager to talk about energy costs. They should read "Go Big, Save Big" and then follow that advice. California is taking baby steps. The CPUC voted on Thursday on the proposed decision to move forward with its **proposed decision designating initial priority neighborhood decarbonization zones**. It can go much further in 2026.

Welcome to The Drain, a weekly roundup of environmental and climate news. Our song this week is "Electric Feel" by MGMT. Here's what else I see. Happy Holidays.

Living with Climate Change

Low snowpack, leftover burn scars, and abnormally warm temperatures are supercharging the atmospheric rivers hitting the Pacific Northwest and leading to horrible flooding in Washington state, **Zoya Teirstein** reports for Grist.

Check out these incredible photographs from the Associated Press of humans marveling at, suffering from, and fighting climate change during 2025. Amid much misery, however, there was bravery and determination, as people fought to restore ecosystems and protect lands and forests," writes AP editor **Peter Prengaman**.

And if you live in British Columbia, you have a very cool way to tell the story of climate change yourself. EcoLens is a web platform that invites BC residents to "share their personal experiences of climate change through photos, stories, and other creative expressions." California and Washington state need something like EcoLens to amplify our understanding of climate change's role in our lives.

Because 2025 is on track to be the second-warmest year on record, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service, the European Union agency that monitors global warming.

These record-setting temps in the Arctic are causing problems: The Arctic's annual

checkup by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration documents a warmer, rainier Arctic and 200 Alaskan rivers “rusting” as melting tundra leaches minerals from the soil into waterways.

Nick Foukal, an oceanographer at the University of Georgia, led a two-week expedition of researchers who sailed from Iceland to Greenland’s east coast this summer with a shipload of data-gathering equipment. **Raymond Zhong** tagged along.

The new UN Global Environment Outlook report, produced by more than 200 researchers, finds that “food and fossil fuel production is causing $5 billion of environmental damage an hour” and implores rapid global systemic transformation to avoid societal collapse.

And yet countries representing 92% of the global economy have now decoupled consumption-based carbon emissions and GDP expansion, according to the report by the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit.

The 10-year anniversary of the Paris Agreement came and went last week with some meager recognition. **Robinson Meyer** describes the ways in which the accord was not a failure “although it would be difficult — in this politically arid moment — to call it a complete success.”

The Guardian’s **Nina Lakhani** spent weeks combing through hundreds of autopsy reports, obtained from two county medical examiners using the Freedom of Information Act, and then went to Arizona to report on heat-related deaths during a heatwave to learn more about America’s on-going climate crisis.

And climate change is coming for our state fair. The California State Fair is shifting from its traditional summer schedule starting in 2027, citing rising temps. A couple years ago, the LA County fair did the same.

Climate Interventions

The Alliance for Just Deliberation on Solar Geoengineering announced it is launching a new strategic initiative, SRM Governance Horizons, to address the growing need for work to comprehend what SRM is and what SRM might become. “Through this initiative, we will publicly examine how political, financial, technological, and socio-cultural forces will shape emergent SRM pathways,” writes **Whitney Peterson** of

Alliance for Just Deliberation on Solar Geoengineering.

The solar geoengineering field needs to move beyond the use of vague rhetoric and the treatment of engagement as a simple binary—as if the choice is simply to engage or not, writes **Shuchi Talati**, also of Alliance for Just Deliberation on Solar Geoengineering, at Physics Today.

James Temple has a deep dive on Stardust, the solar geoengineering startup. The company defends its for-profit status, saying "for-profits working in parallel with academic researchers have delivered "most of the groundbreaking technologies" in recent decades."

Los Angeles and California

The Phillips 66 refinery is closing this month. Now what?

A new report by **Ann Alexander** for CBE and the Asian Pacific Environmental Network recommends that refineries like Phillips 66 write decommissioning plans and set aside funds to carry out cleanups, before they shut down. Bianca Begert goes deep on the report and the situation at the Phillips 66 refinery.

The two bills that make up the Make Polluters Pay legislation in California, AB 1243 and SB 684, will not move forward next month, Politico's California Climate newsletter reports.

In the last several months, 12 California cities have adopted rules that strongly incentivize homeowners who are installing central air conditioning or replacing broken AC systems to get energy-efficient heat pumps that provide both heating and cooling, **Emily Pontecorvo** reports at Heatmap News.

An insurance-backed investigation found properties that had adopted the Zone Zero rules (i.e. had little vegetation and flammable material within five feet) were less likely to burn in the Eaton and Palisades fires. My UCLA colleague **Travis Longcore** told the LAT that the results are "only exploratory."

Kate Cagle and the LA Times Studios' "Rebuilding LA" podcast takes an in-depth look at rebuilding Altadena and Edison's Wildfire Recovery Compensation Program with Edison International president and CEO Pedro Pizarro, who has been doing a notable number of sit-down interviews with journalists in recent months.

The California Coastal Commission voted last week to approve the state and federal permits PG&E needs before it can receive final approval to continue operating the Diablo Canyon Power Plant in San Luis Obispo.

Sen. Ben Allen rolled out a policy platform Thursday as he campaigns to become California's next insurance commissioner in 2026. The platform, shared with POLITICO, includes "getting more people off the last-resort FAIR Plan, spending more to reduce the risk of wildfire damage and revealing the oil and gas investments of insurance companies."

My UCLA colleagues at the UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation have a new report on what defines a plastic-burdened community. It traces how this expanding plastic economy maps directly onto California's oil and gas footprint. "As demand for gasoline declines, oil and gas companies are betting their future on plastic," **Veronica Herrera** and **Daniel Coffee** write at CalMatters.

EVs

Ford announced a retreat from EVs, saying it will refocus on hybrids and smaller cars with "efficient gas engines," but also grow the manufacturing of batteries, and boost truck production. Ford will lose $19.5 billion in charges from this pullback and restructuring. Ford also canceled plans for a new electric truck.

Sixteen states and Washington D.C. sued the Trump administration in Washington federal court this week to stop the U.S. government from blocking billions of dollars in congressionally approved funds meant to expand the country's electric vehicle charging infrastructure, **Ben Adlin** reports at Law360.

EU officials proposed backing off plans to phase out sales of new internal combustion cars by 2035, Bloomberg reports.

An autonomous Rivian? Rivian last week outlined what *TechCrunch* called "an ambitious effort that includes new hardware, including lidar and custom silicon, and eventually, a potential entry into the self-driving ride-hail market."

Jack Ewing has a NYT feature on Ford's efforts to not lose out on the future, by enlisting Silicon Valley. "The best hope is to leapfrog the Chinese by producing better batteries, more efficient electric motors and other breakthroughs and then doing it again and again."

A USC study found that emergency room visits for asthma declined modestly when as few as 20 zero-emissions vehicles per 1,000 residents were added to the roads.

Energy

China has gone from spending nothing on fusion energy in 2021 to making investments this year that outmatch the rest of the world's efforts combined, the NYT reports in a feature titled "Clean, Limitless Energy Exists. China Is Going Big in the Race to Harness It."

Meanwhile, China's hunger for coal is set to drop by 2027, more than cancelling out the effects of the Trump administration's coal-friendly policies in the US, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

In the U.S., the average U.S. household is projected to spend nearly $1,000 this winter to heat its home, up 9.2 percent from a year earlier, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association.

France updated its National Low-Carbon Strategy with an end date for using fossil fuels: sometime between 2040 and 2045," France24 reports.

Texas is the site of a $400-425 million solar cell fabrication plant from T1 Energy, around 50 miles from Austin.

Three Democrat Senators (Warren, Van Hollen, and Blumenthal) want info from tech firms about the growing energy use of data centers and whether it's raising the utility bills of individuals and other businesses.

Climate Denial and Politics

The Trump administration announced that it is breaking up one of the world's preeminent earth and atmospheric research institutions over concerns about "climate alarmism." Democratic state officials and scientists called the move an assault on science and education, WaPo reports.

In the House, far-right Republicans and anti-offshore wind critics joined with Democrats in a nearly-successful attempt to defeat a procedural vote on the SPEED Act, that's the bill to streamline implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act. That's a bad sign for its prospects, **Jael Holzman** reports for Heatmap.

The EPA scrubbed any mention of fossil fuels — the main driver of global warming — from its webpage explaining the causes of climate change. “Now it mentions only natural phenomena, even though scientists calculate that nearly all of the warming is due to human activity,” AP’s **Seth Borenstein** reports.

If you thought this year was bad, wait. Next year will begin to reveal if the rules that rise from Trump’s regulatory demolition in 2025 survive judicial review, **Jean Chemnick** writes at E&E.

BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Shell spent 25 years running hundreds of deceptive ads to falsely reposition themselves as partners in the fight against climate change, according to a new report by the Center for Climate Integrity, which reviews 300 ads.

The Trump administration is demanding that the EU exempt American oil and gas from a new law governing fuel imports’ methane emissions, Reuters reports.