



Washington Post offices in Washington D.C. Photo: mob mob via Flickr (CC BY-N.C. 2.0) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/biblicone/3666632892>

I cancelled my subscription to the Washington Post earlier this week. Not to protest billionaire owner Jeff Bezos or anything. Just because I felt like I wasn't getting all that much for my \$3 a week, and it was time to downsize my media subscriptions. I had signed up for the WaPo a couple years ago precisely because they'd invested heavily in their climate reporting. Lately, it'd felt sparse. So, I performed the sad but mundane ritual of unsubscribing. I would still keep tabs on their climate desk, I told myself.

Now, I'm not sure if there even still is a climate desk. The [news](#) broke on Wednesday morning that Washington Post management had laid off one-third of its staff as part of "a significant restructuring across the company" — some 300 of its 800 journalists. Among the many staffers [laid off](#): The Post's beat reporter who covers Amazon, **Caroline O'Donovan**; [Dino Grandoni](#), a reporter covering wildlife, biodiversity and other environmental issues; **Nitasha Tiku**, who has

today's [front page story](#) on Elon Musk cutting safeguards for his xAI, as well as numerous international journalists, sports writers, and many (maybe all?) of its photojournalists.

The layoffs will absolutely diminish climate coverage from the Washington Post. Included in the layoffs were at least 13 reporters and editors covering climate and the environment, according to a source familiar with the cuts. (I emailed the Post's top editors asking about the climate desk cuts but didn't hear back.)

Change was already afoot. There's been noticeably fewer climate stories. If you read The Drain's weekly roundup of environmental news stories, you may have noticed the name **Maxine Joselow**, who spent several years reporting for The Washington Post, first as author of its very good, daily climate newsletter and then as its lead reporter covering climate policy and politics in Washington. In June, she [jumped](#) from the Washington Post to the New York Times, where she's been publishing great scoops on EPA. Another frequent byline I'd come to rely on was **Anna Phillips**, a former climate reporter at the Post who also told great national stories. Staff at the Washington Post [were finalists](#) for a 2025 Pulitzer for their "sweeping examination of the human and environmental toll of Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina, including stories about the arrival of conspiracy theorists in one town and the efforts of residents of another to rebuild three months later." Now some of those Pulitzer Finalists don't have jobs.



Protest outside of Amazon offices in Santa Monica on Jan 30., 2026

More importantly, we're witnessing the dramatic decline of a storied institution that defined ambitious journalism in America since the early 1970s. I grew up in Northern Virginia during the '80s and '90s when the Post was a solidly regional newspaper, more than a national brand. It was the print newspaper that I used to underline and bring to Social Studies class in middle school to learn about how to read the news and discuss current affairs. So, it was cool to see it reinvent what it meant to be a newspaper in 2017 when it upped its digital game and added "Democracy Dies in Darkness" tagline to its masthead. Sure, the slogan is tacky, but at least it planted a flag for hard-nosed political reporting in Trump 1. Today, it's just the butt of online meme jokes. Today's layoffs are an almost incomprehensible retreat from that path. What makes sense is that Bezos isn't so interested after all in coverage of Silicon Valley's excesses, the climate crisis, or democracy.

I'm sure that great journalism — and environmental journalism — will still come out of the Washington Post. But it seems like it will be in spite of the paper's

management not because of it. And it's one more national outlet that is making the strategic decision to empty the desks filled by people who help write the first draft of history about human-caused climate change.

Welcome to *The Drain*, a weekly roundup of environmental and climate stories from *Legal Planet*. Our song this week is ["Incomprehensible"](#) by *Big Thief*.

California



EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin was in the Palisades today, one week after Trump tapped him to (at least act like he could) take over the permitting process for rebuilding. "Back on the ground today in L.A. to help break through whatever local logjams are still delaying the rebuild following the January 2025 wildfires," Zeldin tweeted. "It's going to be a great day!"

Four of the leading candidates running to be California's next governor answered climate questions during a forum focused on the environment, hosted by CLEE, The Climate Center, California Environmental Voters, and others, co-moderated by **Sammy Roth**. Video of the entire event is [here](#).

California Environmental Voters released a [poll last week](#) that found 71% of surveyed likely voters prioritize controlling gas and electric bills.

Is Tom Steyer's promise to cut utility bills 25% realistic? **Jeanne Kuang** [looks at that](#) for CalMatters with input from consumer and ratepayer advocates.

The LA Times [covered](#) the forum's focus on "how climate policy must address affordability, particularly the cost of electric vehicles compared with gas-fueled cars."

The deadline to introduce new bills in Sacramento? February 20. Assembly Speaker **Robert Rivas** said "2026 is about affordability" during his [Monday announcement of his legislative priorities](#). "Eliminating perverse incentives that lead to overbuilding utility infrastructure is an important step to minimizing excessive costs that produce minimal rewards," said Sen. **Ben Allen**, the new chair of the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee. The POLITICO crew [has a roundup](#) of affordability bills so far.

There's new language laying out how Gov. Newsom plans to structure a \$200 million electric vehicle rebate program, "including price caps, automaker matching funds and a focus on first-time buyers," [writes Alejandro Lazo](#) at CalMatters.

Lawmakers in the Assembly last week [moved to direct](#) the California Transportation Commission to prepare a study on the effects of a road charge, which could impose a fee based on the number of miles people drive over a specified period. Republicans [freaked](#).

Since 2017, Cal OES has completed only [six after-action reports](#), a fraction of the more than 100 that need to be completed following disasters like wildfires. Eighteen are listed by the agency as in process, **Jacob Margolis** [reports](#) at LAist.

A coalition of wildlife advocates is calling for the state to bring back, expand and fund a coexistence program meant to resolve conflict between people and wolves, mountain lions and coyotes. , at roughly \$15 million annually, **Lila Seidman**

[reports](#) for Boiling Point. “Sen. Catherine Blakespear will soon introduce legislation that would create the program, her office confirmed. Nonprofits Defenders of Wildlife and the National Wildlife Federation are co-sponsors.”

The BLM has revived its effort to open more of California’s public lands to oil extraction, but its strategy has changed little since the agency’s earlier attempt in 2019, **Blanca Begert** [reports](#) for Inside Climate News. “They’re more encouraged, and that makes us more concerned about them going forward,” said Cooper Kass, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity.

LA County has its first [heat action plan](#), **Erin Stone** [reports](#) at LAist. The blueprint, approved by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, comes as LA County is experiencing longer, hotter and deadlier heat waves. “It’s one of the only such plans in the region dedicated to extreme heat.”

Sure, HWY 1 is open around Big Sur again, but “no one expects this will be the end of Highway 1’s battle with the forces of nature, especially in a world facing the intensifying effects of human-caused climate change,” LAT’s **Grace Toohey** [writes](#).

Joe Linton, who has advocated for L.A. River bikeways since the 1990s and wrote a book about the L.A. River, [shares his take](#) on Metro’s latest “frustrating attempt to complete the river path.”

And 32-year-old Catherine Breed plans to swim the length of California’s Pacific Coast this summer, planning the three- to four-month swim along more than 900 miles of coast — partly to highlight environmental threats to the ocean, [writes](#) **James Rainey**. “We’re seeing kelp deforestation happening on the North Coast. The ocean could reach a level of acidity that hasn’t been seen in millions of years,” Breed said. “When you love someplace, you want to protect it. We’re telling this story to try to get more people engaged, get people inspired, get people educated.”

The Courts



A record like the Bad News Bears: Yet another federal judge has [struck down](#) the Interior Department's attempt to kill an offshore wind farm — this time it was Sunrise Wind off the coast of New York — the fifth time the courts have ruled against the Trump administration. That's Wind 5: Trump, 0.

Starting last autumn, in a move that had not been previously reported, Chief Justice John Roberts converted what was once a norm — keeping court information confidential — into a formal contract by making court employees sign an NDA, a five people familiar with the shift [told](#) Jodi Kantor at the New York Times.

Judge Tana Lin in the Western District of Washington last Friday [barred](#) the Trump administration from any further interference in the \$5 billion effort to build electric vehicle charging stations on highways. “It is simply not how things are lawfully done,” Lin wrote.

A coalition of national environmental groups and community nonprofits [is suing Trump and the EPA](#) in district court, seeking to overturn the unprecedented move to

give some polluters exemptions from a handful of Clean Air Act rules. Presidents “can only grant an exemption if the technology to meet the standard is not available and the exemption is in the country’s national interest,” Grist [reports](#).

Utilities in Colorado have [filed a petition](#) asking the Department of Energy to reconsider its December order demanding that they keep running Craig Generating Station’s Unit 1, a jointly owned coal plant in Colorado, for the next 90 days.

Last week I told you about a first-of-its-kind legal argument in a new climate lawsuit by the state of Michigan. **Emily Pontecorvo** dives deeper into the arguments, [writing](#) “Rather than allege that Big Oil deceived the public about the dangers of its products, Michigan is bringing an antitrust case, arguing that the industry worked as a cartel to stifle competition from non-fossil fuel resources.”

In Europe, the Netherlands must pursue tougher emissions-cutting targets to align with the Paris Agreement in the name of protecting Bonaire, one of its Caribbean island territories, from the effects of climate change. That’s [the order](#) from the District Court of The Hague in a case brought by Greenpeace.

Cars

For the very first time, every car on [Consumer Reports’ “Top Pick” list](#) is either a hybrid (or available as one) or an electric vehicle.

The Trump administration plans to roll back vehicle mileage standards for heavy-duty pickup trucks and vans, it [announced in a letter](#) to manufacturers Friday.

In Europe, EV sales zoomed past gas cars in December for the first time and surged 30% to a record high last year, with battery-powered models outselling gas-burning cars for the first time last month, the Financial Times [reported](#).

CEO Elon Musk [said](#) last week that Tesla would begin phasing out its Model S and Model X electric vehicles this year and upgrade its California factory to produce “humanoid robots” instead.

The fast-charging network for EVs in the U.S. grew by more than 30% in 2025, with over 18,000 new ports installed, the Washington Post [reports](#).

Energy



The Department of Energy says it will begin excluding advanced nuclear reactors from major requirements of NEPA. DOE announced the change Monday in a [notice in the Federal Register](#).

It comes a week after DOE overhauled a set of nuclear safety rules and shared them with companies it's regulating but not with the public, **Geoff Brumfiel reports** at NPR. "The sweeping changes were made to accelerate development of a new generation of nuclear reactor designs."

The new FREEDOM Act aims to protect energy developments from changing political winds. The bipartisan bill, introduced in the House Tuesday morning, "seeks to curb the executive branch's power to claw back previously-granted permits, protecting energy projects of all kinds from whiplash every time the political winds change," **Alexander Kaufman reports** at Heatmap News.

Here's a [great profile](#) by **Cara Buckley** of a land developer in Las Cruces, New Mexico that has decided to ditch gas and go all-electric for roughly 4,000 homes in order to save time and money. "Forgoing gas saves his company \$3,000 per lot, and allowed it to deliver the sites to homebuilders more quickly, lowering construction costs and yielding a faster investment return," Buckley writes. More are on the way.

Coal-fired electricity generation in the Lower 48 states soared 31% during Winter Storm Fern's Arctic temperatures, according to this [analysis](#) by the Energy Information Administration.

The opinion pages of the (RIP) Washington Post [point out](#) that Trump's pro-coal fetish could cost Americans billions of dollars.

Speaking of journalism foe Jeff Bezos, his climate philanthropy is staking efforts to pave the way for building at least 10 new U.S. nuclear reactors. Axios reports that the "\$3.5 million grant to the nonprofit [Nuclear Scaling Initiative](#) envisions an "orderbook" that "brings together multiple buyers to commit to building the same reactor design."

Gas and electric asked ratepayers for a lot more money last year. A new report from PowerLines puts the total requested increases at \$31 billion — more than double the number from 2024. "In 2026, the utility bills are likely to continue to rise, barring some major, sweeping action." Those could affect some 81 million consumers, PowerLines' **Charles Hua** [told Matthew Zeitlin](#) and other reporters.

New [findings](#) from Global Energy Monitor, a San Francisco-based nonprofit, detail the explosive growth in demand for gas-fired plants to feed data centers. Building all the gas-fired power infrastructure that was in development at the end of last year could increase the US gas fleet by nearly 50 percent, **Molly Taft** [reports](#) for WIRED. "A larger concern with natural gas is methane leaks during the extraction process."

The Trump administration ripped away hundreds of millions of dollars for clean energy projects on tribal lands when the Environmental Protection Agency [clawed back the entirety of \\$7 billion](#) in Solar for All funds. Now tribes are fighting to salvage their work, **Jeff St. John** [reports](#) at Canary Media.

Trump administration

Expect word on the endangerment finding's fate any day now. Trump officials have delayed finalizing the repeal of the endangerment finding because of "concerns the proposal is too weak to withstand a court challenge," sources [told Jake Spring](#) with the Washington Post. The White House's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, which reviews agency regulations, has expressed concerns over the strength of the scientific and economic analysis of the proposed repeal, the people

said. The White House's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs' public calendar lists meetings through Feb. 10 to discuss the proposal with lobbyists, industry groups and health and environmental advocates.

Janet McCabe, who worked at EPA in the 2010s as an Obama administration appointee, [wrote at The Conversation](#) that the Trump administration's new way of evaluating pollution rules hands deregulators a sledgehammer and license to ignore public health. The requirement that agencies conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis dates back to President Ronald Reagan's efforts to cut regulatory costs in the 1980s. The change "will almost certainly lead to an increase in harmful pollution that America has made so much [progress reducing over the decades](#)."

The Trump administration has been telling wild lies about the ICE attacks in Minnesota. "Where the GOP learned to lie as a matter of course is an interesting question, and I'm afraid I've had a front row seat," **Bill McKibben** [writes](#) at his Substack. "I think it's the climate fight, more than anything else, that taught them to regard reality as optional."