Californians will elect a new governor in November. The race presents state voters with a wider variety of potential outcomes for climate policy–from increased ambition to continuity to changed priorities–than any election since 2010. To help voters understand where the candidates stand on our most pressing environmental challenges, the Center for Law, Energy, and the Environment (CLEE) recently co-moderated a gubernatorial forum organized by California Environmental Voters.

As Mary Creasman, CEO of California Environmental Voters, noted in her opening remarks, Californians are currently facing an intersection of climate and economic crises, where “unnatural disasters” like the fires in Los Angeles are driving up the cost of living, from insurance to groceries. With the federal government rolling back environmental progress in the state, the consensus was clear: the next governor of the world’s fourth-largest economy must be ready to lead globally while protecting communities locally.



PASADENA, CALIFORNIA – JANUARY 28: (L-R) Xavier Becerra, Katie Porter, Tom Steyer, Eric Swalwell, Louise Bedsworth and Sammy Roth attend “Our Climate Future: A Forum with California’s Next Governor” on January 28, 2026 in Pasadena, California. (Photo by Matei Horvath/Getty Images for California Environmental Voters)

The forum invited the top six candidates based on publicly-available polling. Four of the candidates accepted the invite and joined in-person:

- **Xavier Becerra**, Civil Rights Attorney and former CA Attorney General
- **Katie Porter**, Consumer Protection Attorney
- **Tom Steyer**, Business Leader and Climate Advocate
- **Eric Swalwell**, U.S. Representative

Tony Thurmond, Antonio Villaraigosa, and Betty Yee, candidates who did not poll in the top six candidates, were invited to submit video responses to the questions asked in the forum. Their responses will be linked to on climatevote.org when they are available.

The 90-minute discussion was moderated by CLEE Executive Director Louise Bedsworth and former LA Times Climate Reporter Sammy Roth, and the forum moved through a wide range of complex topics. The moderators posed questions on the following topics:

- **Energy Transition and Affordability**: As governor, how would you speed up clean energy deployment, bring down electricity prices, and phase out fossil fuels? How do you accelerate the transition from fossil fuels while ensuring reliable and affordable gas supplies in California?
- **Public Transit**: What would you all do as governor to prioritize funding for public transit and for transit oriented communities and walkable communities as well that make it easier for people to get around without driving
- **Environmental Justice**: What actions would you take to hold corporate polluters accountable and strengthen protections for low-income communities and people of color impacted by high pollution burdens?
- **Clean Water**: What would you do as governor to ensure that environmental justice communities with polluted and overpumped groundwater aquifers have clean and reliable water supplies, and also to make sure that parts of California that are frequently stricken by drought have reliable and clean water supplies?
- **Federal Rollbacks**: The federal government is pulling back money for adaptation and resilience projects. Where should the money come from?
- **Accountability and Insurance**: Following a video question from a wildfire survivor, who asked ‘What will you do to make insurance fairer and make fossil fuel companies who’ve caused more intense fires and extreme weather help pay to fix the problem instead of victims like me?’ Candidates were also asked how they would fix the broken insurance market and if they supported a “Climate Superfund” act to make fossil fuel companies pay for resilience costs.
- **Conservation**: How would you achieve the state’s “30 by 30” conservation goal, especially as the Trump administration is rolling back protections for

national monuments and other public lands and the need to cite large scale renewable energy projects, transmission, and other infrastructure that’s needed to meet our climate goals?
- **Infrastructure and Housing**: Do you think California should expand the use of rooftop solar? If so, how much, and how would you make it as affordable for as many Californians as possible? How you would help to cut red tape and make it easier for households to get heat pumps, electric stoves, and to electrify more of our homes and businesses?
- **Data Centers**: Data centers are expected to use massive amounts of energy and water. They can also impact electric bills. But they are also major sources of economic activity. How do you reconcile those priorities, the environmental impacts, but also the potential benefits?

The event concluded with each candidate outlining their top three priorities for accelerating California’s climate progress.

Watch the Forum To hear the full responses from the candidates and learn more about their specific plans for California’s future, you can watch the full recording of the event here: California Climate Vote: Candidates Forum.

For further background, you can also access CLEE’s Climate Issue Briefs, which provide clear, accessible overviews of the major climate and energy issues facing California.