



Mayor Karen Bass (Credit: City of LA)

As Angelenos cast their ballots for mayor, Chevron is making clear which candidate it prefers: Mayor Karen Bass. This week brought news that the Chevron Corporation [donated \\$50,000](#) to a labor union-sponsored independent expenditure committee supporting Bass's mayoral campaign.

Sammy Roth [reported](#) on the donation at Climate Colored Goggles, noting that the situation resembles the gubernatorial primary, during which Xavier Becerra benefited from Chevron money. POLITICO's **Melanie Mason** [included the news](#) in the California Playbook newsletter.

Now, an independent expenditure committee isn't the same as a candidate's own campaign, of course, but a politician can always say "no thanks" or publicly condemn the action. That's what Bass has done in this case. "I was surprised to learn that an oil company donated to an outside committee that I am legally barred from coordinating with or soliciting funds for," Bass [said on X](#). "They should take the money back and use it to lower the astronomical prices Angelenos pay at the pump." Since her statement on Sunday, which was commendable, I've seen no sign that Chevron intends to withdraw the money, and if it did, that might even be construed as "coordinating" with the campaign.

Still, it's important to shine a spotlight on this kind of corporate money and to ask, why does Chevron want Karen Bass to win, and what does the company want in return? That's why I signed a letter that takes issue with the donation. In the letter, more than 100 academics and advocates working on climate, environmental, and environmental justice issues wrote that "Our message is unequivocal: Don't pollute our politics, people, planet and pocket books."

Make no mistake, this kind of donation is Big Oil's attempt to influence a *local* election.

Chevron, one of the largest U.S. oil companies, operates one of the nation's largest refineries in [El Segundo](#). Chevron is also a big proponent of the kind of corporate speech that can drown out individual speech, as I [recently wrote](#) about in a review of Amy Westervelt's new book "Bought To You By." (Key line: "It's very hard to evaluate the merits of two competing ideas when one is being amplified with the sort of megaphone that only a giant multinational can afford and the other is being

distributed by an academic press while also being constantly criticized and ridiculed by the folks with the giant megaphone,” Westervelt writes.)

Here’s another reason why this matters: Almost exactly one year ago, Los Angeles was dealing with a massive fire that erupted at Chevron’s oil refinery. Remember when that event sent up huge flames and plumes of smoke that could be seen for miles around the South Bay? Mayor Karen Bass was briefed on the explosion and told the public her office was monitoring the situation, along with the governor. For a couple days, the explosion was big news and [an investigation](#) was focusing on the refinery’s Isomax unit, which converts oil into higher-value products such as jet fuel. That’s the last time I heard anything about the incident; what about you?

The city’s mayor, along with the governor and federal officials, is expected to lead when a corporation endangers the health and safety of residents. That was also the test earlier this year when the Lineage cold-storage warehouse in Boyle Heights caught fire. When a corporate polluter’s donation helps secure an official’s victory, it’s fair to ask whether we can really trust that corporation will be held accountable when it harms Angelenos.

So, what does a big donation like this say about how Karen Bass would lead for another 4 years versus how her challenger City Councilmember Nithya Raman would lead? Think bigger than city politics for a second. As a state, we are staring down the barrel of a refinery transition over the next several years, and oil companies like Chevron are clearly being strategic about the partners they want to work with in state and local government as we proceed in this energy transition. Though it’s easy to forget, LA is still a seat of the oil and gas industry in California, and local leadership here will have a role to play as we decide what comes next and how quickly. I think it’s fair to say that the oil industry views the incumbent 73-year-old mayor as less of a wild card than the 45-year-old progressive, urban planner turned city councilmember. These are good questions for voters to ask about both candidates’ backers — whether it’s [AirBnB](#) supporting Bass or a [construction workers’ union](#) supporting Raman.

Now, go vote. We don’t endorse candidates or specific measures here at Legal Planet, but we certainly endorse voting and, in this environment, voting early.

Welcome to The Drain, a roundup of environmental and climate news from Legal Planet. Our song this week is [“Money,” by Widowspeak](#), one of 600 songs on my Climate Playlist.

MEDIA



Happy Birthday to the aforementioned **Climate Colored Goggles**, which turned 1-year old this week. Former LA Times climate columnist **Sammy Roth** struck out on his own last October and since then has sent more than 100 newsletters about climate, pop culture, sports and politics. About 8,000 people have signed up for his Substack and nearly 1,000 are paid subscribers, but Roth says he's "20 paid subscribers short of my financial sustainability target for Year 1." You can subscribe [here](#).

Energy News Network veteran **Bridget Reed Morawski** [announced the launch](#) of the Potomac Current, a curation of everything environmental happening in the Washington metropolitan area or "DMV." She'll be covering anything from "energy affordability and environmental justice to conservation of our wildlife, waterways, and lands."

Adithi Ramakrishnan announced that she is now covering climate solutions for AP's Climate and Environment Team. "I'm interested in efforts to tackle climate change big and small, spotlighting the interesting people and places doing the work," she [shared](#) on LinkedIn.

Climate coverage on CBS Evening News under **Bari Weiss'** "leadership," fell 81% in January–September 2026 compared with the same months in 2025, according to a [Media Matters analysis](#) that also found that CBS aired segments that discounted scientific warnings and downplayed the consequences of climate policy.

Non-profit **TreePeople** [announced](#) a team of content creators who will be ambassadors for sharing their "Rooting for LA" mission to plant 28,000 trees in the Greater LA region by 2028.

And Netflix's [Below](#) is a show about climate change without being about climate change. It's set in Snook's Arm, Newfoundland, a down-and-out fishing community whose residents are suffering from economic decline, depleted fisheries and a government resettlement offer. Basically it's a sea monster story with [capitalism and climate](#) in the background.

EVs

Did you read the recent LA Times exposé on California's clean vehicle voucher program?

With more than \$1 billion spent, [California's Clean Truck and Bus Voucher Incentive Project](#), sometimes called HVIP, is facing accusations of fraud, waste and poor oversight, the LA Times reported. "Officials say the voucher program has helped to accelerate the adoption of zero-emission trucks and buses, but some businesses and transit agencies claim that officials have failed to properly vet vehicle manufacturers," **Tony Briscoe** and **Sandhya Kambhampati** [write](#).

CARB officials are pushing back hard on the premise of the reporting. At [a state committee hearing](#) on Tuesday, CARB Deputy Executive Officer **Christopher Grundler** said CARB had shared lots of information with the LA Times about "how the program evolved and adapted over the years and the reporter chose to ignore all that and write a story that focused on a very small subset of firms and vehicles where there was alleged problems and fraud but remarkably failed to disclose to their readers that it was the CARB team that uncovered the alleged wrongdoing through our very multi-layered, redundant guardrails and checks and balances that we have in place, and ignored the fact that this program... has put over 16,000 clean trucks on the road in California." The LAT is planning to [do more stories](#).

U.S. consumers purchased more than 262,600 new EVs in the third quarter of this year — making for two straight quarters of sales growth after last year's face-plant, [according to Cox Automotive](#).

In this third quarter, 23% of new light-duty vehicles sold in the U.S. were hybrid, plug-in hybrid, or fully electric, [according](#) to the EIA.

Elon Musk [unveiled](#) his long-promised [next-generation Tesla Roadster](#) or rather a mock-up of a two-seat electric "car" equipped with rocket thrusters and a powerful suction system. Some press reports described it as a car that "flies, does backflips and even drives upside down."

Karl Bode was less than impressed about a fake car fake flying. "The U.S. consolidated press once again demonstrates its dedication to lazy "CEO said a thing!" pseudo-journalism, he [writes](#).

POLITICS + LEGISLATION

BAAJA, the bipartisan Senate permitting bill is supposed to protect offshore wind from Trump retribution and the promise of financial relief is meant to lure investors back to the renewable energy industry, but [experts tell](#) Grist that they fear it won't be enough to keep the Trump administration at bay.

NRDC, [in a memo](#), listed critical areas where it's seeking improvements to that bipartisan permitting bill. "One is revision of 'project certainty' provisions so they don't 'unduly favor the current administration's energy choices,'" Axios reports.

Former officials from the Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations have joined forces to [write an open letter](#) supporting the Senate's permitting reform bill. They include **Janet Yellen, Timothy Geithner, Hank Paulson, Jason Furman,** and **Leon Panetta** among others.

The Center on Global Energy Policy [unveiled](#) a new interactive tool that aims to show how much time could be saved on permitting transmission, solar, geothermal, and other energy projects under the proposed legislation.

On the campaign trail... Trump cabinet officials appear to be campaigning for Republicans. EPA administrator **Lee Zeldin** is visiting battleground districts and states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin in the runup to the midterm elections. Are the trips for policy or politics? It "generates concern, in the view of the political watchdog group that is taking on [a \\$20 million taxpayer-funded advertising campaign praising Trump and his administration](#)," **Marianne Lavelle writes** for Inside Climate News.

Energy Secretary **Chris Wright** meanwhile was in Texas [campaigning](#) with Ken Paxton this week, and making his pitch to keep building data centers.

Trump is [pledging](#) \$8 billion in one-time relief payments to U.S. farmers this harvest season to provide relief during market disruptions and increased input costs that the administration has partly caused.

Data For Progress released [a poll](#) assessing U.S. voters' attitudes toward the insurance affordability crisis, and oil and gas companies' role in driving rising costs for policyholders. It found 75% of voters — including more than two-thirds of Republican voters — "oppose legal immunity for oil and gas companies, shielding

them from being held accountable for climate disaster damages.”

Here’s a cool form of political protest: A life-sized statue of Ron DeSantis — Florida’s governor who consistently opposes legislation to addressing climate change — was unveiled and then promptly began melting as intended in front of an audience in Tallahassee, **Oliver Millman** [reports](#) for the Guardian.

DATA CENTERS + ENERGY



At least 17 data center campuses (a total of 35 data center-related applications) covering more than 24,000 acres of US federal land — US *public* lands — are pending or active across six Western states, Reuters [reports](#).

“This project was presented as a Noah’s Ark that’s going to come save everybody... But the community sees this project as a Trojan horse.” **Dana Kerr** and **Gabrielle Canon** at the Guardian [have a profile](#) of a 66-year-old lawyer who has been trying to bring a massive data center to Imperial County, and whom they say is emblematic of the “modern-day prospectors seeking land in hopes of cashing in on one of the fastest-growing and most lucrative industries on Earth.”

Railroads in the 19th century consumed about \$173 billion in today’s dollars and created more than 2% of the nation’s annual GDP over 20 years, but by contrast “today’s data center buildout will dwarf that amount, with \$10 trillion in investment, and now have almost twice the economic impact — nearly 4% of GDP,” according to [Stateline’s coverage](#) of a Columbia Business School [report](#).

Last month, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott [directed](#) the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality to “halt all permits sought by data centers” but an investigation by **Public Citizen** and **FracTracker** found that the approval process has since moved forward for dozens of data center projects.

El Paso and New Mexico spent millions of dollars drafting climate plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions. “Neither plan considered how three new data centers could upend their climate goals,” the Texas Tribune and ProPublica [report](#). I have a feeling this reporting approach could be replicated in many other places.

The U.S. Department of Energy said this week it will use a Cold War-era law to award \$42 million in Defense Production Act funding to the Constitution Pipeline to help pay for the cost of “pre-construction and permitting activities” to build it into the Northeast.

Amazon is backing a deal for another power plant built with X-energy’s next-generation reactors at a former coal site in Indiana and Google unveiled a new “enhanced partnership” with utility giant Entergy in Arkansas to power the tech giant’s West Memphis campus, [reports Alexander Kaufman](#) at Heatmap News.

The New York Times [looks at](#) the utility bill crisis from Oklahoma just as bills are “coming due for the hottest summer on record in the United States” and disconnections are starting to peak. “The last three months were about three degrees above average, hotter than the Dust Bowl summer of 1936 and the heat dome of 2021, and tens of millions of people can’t afford to pay for the air-conditioning that helped keep them safe in the deadly heat.”

The UK government has approved the Jackdaw gasfield in the North Sea, a move that was expected but controversial because Labour’s 2024 election manifesto committed to a ban on new drilling licenses in the North Sea, the Guardian [reports](#).

CALIFORNIA

Hotter, longer summers and more extreme floods are in our future: California’s Fifth Climate Change Assessment, [published on Monday](#), sounds some familiar warnings: more wildfires, bigger storms, longer droughts. But it illustrates in unsettling detail just how quickly the climate is being reshaped, and reveals what is likely to be major upheaval to long-established ways of life in California,” [writes](#) the New York Times.

San Diego’s Montgomery-Gibbs Executive Airport is the highest lead-polluting general aviation airport in the U.S., [according](#) to federal data obtained via an *inewssource* records request. “Last year, the three-runway airport in Kearny Mesa sold more leaded fuel than in any other year in over a decade.”

My UCLA Emmett Institute colleague **Denise Grab** was quoted in an LAT story that fact-checks some of the viral claims about sky-high electricity bills for LADWP customers. “DWP says its recent high bills are driven by spiking power use during the record-breaking summer heat, especially for air conditioning, not by rate

increases,” **Balance Begert** [writes](#).

Mayor **Karen Bass** [issued a statement this week](#) telling LADWP customers to pay what they can afford now, and rest assured that the utility was pausing any shutoffs through the end of the year. “Beginning next month, LADWP will provide every residential customer with information about their electricity and water usage, to improve awareness of how they use utilities and how they can conserve,” she said,” making clear that “LADWP’s conservation programs can help permanently reduce usage and lower bills.”