Summary

In the aftermath of the 2026 election, Democrats in Congress can do a lot to hinder Trump's anti-environmental policies but much less to advance their own climate agenda. The real opportunities for progress are in the states. Consider Texas, a state that has long been under iron GOP control and also the country's biggest emitter of carbon. Democrats will now control all statewide offices and one legislative chamber. Or there's Wisconsin, where Democrats will control the governorship and the legislature. These dramatic shifts open up many exciting opportunities for climate and clean energy initiatives. We can't foresee all the long-term effects, but we do know that in many places the winds are starting to blow in the right direction.

A small event last Thursday captures this moment of change. The Fifth Circuit heard a challenge to Texas's 2021 anti-ESG law, which gives the Texas Comptroller sweeping powers to blacklist companies that disfavor fossil fuels. The law was vigorously defended by the state's current Attorney General. But here's the thing: The new Texas Attorney General will be Nathan Johnson, a Democrat who has no reason to defend the law. And the new Comptroller will be Sarah Eckhardt, another Democrat.

The new Congress will be a significant thorn in the President's side. But Trump's veto power will severely limit its ability to enact policies of its own. It is in the state governments where exciting opportunities exist for major policy changes.

The political configuration and policy potential vary state by state. The opportunity is biggest in states where Democrats won trifectas: Arizona, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Nevada. The last time this happened in Minnesota, the state's clean energy policies took major steps forward.

But there have been major changes in other states too. Democrats flipped governorships in Georgia, Iowa, Texas, Ohio and Nevada, Democrats may also end up with the governor's mansion in Alaska and Kansas. They flipped thirteen legislative chambers. Despite intense gerrymandering, Democrats will have the governor and one legislative chamber in Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia.

Given the focus on affordability right now, we may not see new cap and trade systems or bold new climate targets. But the declining costs of solar, wind, and

battery storage mean that removing barriers will directly advance affordability. Support for rooftop and balcony solar is likely to be especially popular. We can also expect to see greater environmental enforcement against polluters as new governors look for ways to improve local quality of life. That may be especially important in states like Ohio and Texas where polluters have enjoyed a free hand until now. States are also going to have to start grappling with climate change risks that many preferred to ignore under Republican climate deniers.

This will be a heady time of change in many states. We can’t foresee the long-term effects, but we do know that in many places the winds are starting to blow in the right direction.