

Renewable energy advocates received welcome news last week, as Democrats swept both the House and Senate in a historic repudiation of the incumbent administration. Solar and wind have gained some reliable supporters. Troy Jackson, who defeated Senator Susan Collins in Maine, has been a long-time proponent of renewable energy development. Sean McCann, who won Michigan's fourth district, explicitly campaigned on developing renewables and nuclear to support US energy independence. Already, talk of restoring tax credits for green energy production has begun. As electricity demand continues to grow, expanding our clean generation fleet is a sensible idea to keep rates affordable without growing carbon emissions.

Yet in their enthusiasm, Democrats should not forget the backbone of the electricity grid: transmission. The buildout of renewable energy today is not hampered primarily by costs—photovoltaic solar is already the cheapest source of energy, with onshore wind not far behind. Instead, it is the long delays and high costs involved in constructing the transmission lines meant to carry renewable energy to demand centers that are stalling our transition. Accordingly, much has been made of permitting reform to speed up transmission construction. The Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA) recently passed a procedural vote in the Senate, bringing one major piece of legislation meant to speed up transmission deployment closer to enactment. Backers of the proposed permitting reform bill, which is dividing the environmental movement, see BAAJA as a chance to speed up transmission. Yet there's plenty not to like in the bill too. There is a smaller-scale,

and much less divisive thing, that Democrats could do to achieve similar ends: reestablish the Grid Deployment Office (GDO).

Back in 2021, The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act not only awarded tax credits for renewable energy, but also funded a swath of programs meant to facilitate transmission construction. Among other things, the Act created the GDO, an office under the Department of Energy empowered to provide low-cost financing for transmission development, and even take an ownership stake in transmission projects. By doing so, the GDO could exercise eminent domain authority to speed up transmission construction in a way independent transmission developers would otherwise not be able to. In addition, the GDO conducted essential transmission planning studies that identified opportunities for interregional projects with large returns on investment.

The GDO was a promising experiment. Yet it never got the chance to prove its worth. Just a year after getting off the ground, the GDO was gutted under Trump's restructuring of the Department of Energy. Funding for transmission planning and permitting programs by the Department fell by 90% from 2025 to 2027. The GDO's funding was cut by 75% from 2025 to 2026, and the Office was largely dissolved into the larger Office of Electricity. In August, the Department of Energy announced it would no longer designate any areas as National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors—a function the GDO used to fulfill—which prevented FERC from exercising siting authority within those areas. More than $2 billion in Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership grants were cancelled in October of 2025. The GDO's Transmission Facilitation Program was not officially eliminated, but there has not been a new funding round since Trump took office.

The hollowing out of the GDO coincides with a recognition that transmission buildout is more important than ever. In 2026, the Department of Energy itself reported that there is a "pressing need" for more transmission construction as a result of data center buildout and reshoring of manufacturing. In that same report, the Department hailed the multifold benefits of interregional transmission, the construction of which the federal government is uniquely positioned to facilitate.

With renewed control over the budget, Democrats should push for a restoration of funding to the Department of Energy, coupled with a demand for the revival of the Grid Deployment Office. This may even be a bipartisan issue: Republicans have signaled a desire to work on permitting reform for transmission siting in recent months. The Grid Deployment Office offers an alternative way to speed up

transmission construction—one that does not come coupled with BAAJA's environmental concerns—and its programs would amplify the impact of the proposed Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act.

That bipartisan angle is worth emphasizing. As an executive agency, the Department of Energy is not beholden to Congress' priorities. While the new Democratic majority can allocate more funding to the Department, how—or even whether—that funding will be spent remains up to the Executive Branch. Yet while the Trump administration may be skeptical of renewable energy, it does not have a similar ideological bone to pick with transmission infrastructure. Additionally, developers constructing the data centers Trump is so fond of have been clamoring for more transmission development. Together, that creates a real opportunity for Democrats. It may sound wonky, but restoring the GDO would lay the foundation for large-scale renewable energy deployment. Democrats should make it a priority.