

Elections 2024

Energy, Environmental Policy Shift Expected in Second Trump Administration

By Pam McFarland, Debra K. Rubin



Former President Donald Trump, arriving at an election night watch party in West Palm Beach, Fla., seeks a changed clean energy and environmental agenda from that of his predecessor.

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It's clear that environmental and energy policies that will emerge under President-elect Donald Trump will look very different from those of the Biden administration.

During his early morning acceptance speech on Nov. 6, Trump characterized the Republican sweep as a “mandate” for change, and environmental advocates fear he will be emboldened to reverse policies and funding now in place to address environmental justice inequities and looming impacts of climate change—that he terms a “hoax.”

Trump supporters say he will be more open to an “all-of-the-above” approach to energy sourcing—as outlined in the *Project 2025* publication developed by conservative interests and believed to reflect Trump's ideology—in which a refusal to acknowledge climate change is a key feature. “One hallmark of the first Trump administration was to not pick winners and losers on energy technologies,” said Mark Menezes, former deputy secretary of energy in 2020-2021 and now president and CEO of the U.S. Energy Association, on a Nov. 6 Bracewell Policy Resolution Group webinar. That could be good news for proponents of a variety of nascent and established energy technologies, including nuclear, hydrogen and fusion, he said.

Additionally, the Trump administration is likely to make an early-term priority of reversing the current administration pause on federal export licenses for U.S. LNG export terminal projects to start construction and to be more hands-off in terms of regulating energy programs, with more oversight returned to states. “What I would expect of this incoming Trump administration is to look for where restrictions exist that do not allow choice by those that need ... affordable energy,” Menezes said.

In a quarterly earnings call late last month, Technip Energies CEO Arnaud Pieton stated that a “Trump victory could faster lift the moratorium,” although a federal court in July ordered restrictions. Technip Energies and engineer KBR signed a recent contract to build the Lake Charles LNG plant in Louisiana for pipeline operator Energy Transfer. Pieton said the project, still subject to a final investment decision, is estimated to be valued at up to \$5 billion.

Bipartisanship Needed

Multiple sources say the voting numbers were a symptom of a broad philosophical shift not defined by traditional categories of race or ethnicity, but more by class and educational background. Some suggest the Harris campaign failed to connect with more populist, working class voters more concerned about the economy than other issues, and these voters showed up in large numbers.

Democratic House of Representatives member Nikki Budzinski (D-Ill.), who easily won her re-election campaign, said: “There's a lot of deep soul-searching that we need to be doing as a party, I would say.” With slim margins in both the House and Senate, she said that lawmakers will be forced to work in a bipartisan way on issues where they can find “common ground ... focusing on the areas where we can work together.”

A top priority with bipartisan support will likely be environmental permitting reform, Budzinski said.

Brian Turmail, spokesman for the Associated General Contractors of America, says that too many needed infrastructure projects – particularly related to new broadband connections and electric vehicle charging stations-- have been hamstrung by overly restrictive permitting rules. “One of our repeated frustrations with the Biden administration is that they've not really executed as quickly on environmental reforms as they should have,” he told ENR.

Portland Cement Association seeks Trump Administration support "by addressing regulatory burdens hindering our industry's progress in the utilization of alternative fuels, development of lower-carbon cements and implementation of essential carbon capture technology," president and CEO Mike Ireland said in a statement.

Maria Lehman, U.S. Infrastructure Market Leader for engineer GHD, vice chair of the White House National Infrastructure Advisory Council and American Society of Civil Engineers president emeritus, noted that passage recently of Water Resources Development Act funding was unanimous in the Senate and virtually so in the House. “Infrastructure is still high on the agenda,” she told ENR. “We won't have the tailwinds we had, but we won't have headwinds either.”

Trump campaign rhetoric threatening to rescind what's left of environmental and clean energy funding in the Inflation Reduction Act—or to repeal the law entirely—is expected to face congressional pushback based on its support by a number of red-state legislators. Lehman noted statements by House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) that law revisions would be done “with a scalpel.”

The executive pointed to the extreme level of campaign misinformation related to Biden administration energy and environmental policies and impacts on corporate bottom lines. “Engineers are about the facts,” the executive said. “When people don't have them, it's bad.”

Environmental Policy Fallout

Environmental advocates say the climate crisis is real with impacts that will not wait for anyone. “Existing policies aren't enough to help the United States meet its 2030 goal to cut emissions in half below 2005 levels, let alone deliver additional reductions by 2035,” said Rachel Cleetus, policy director and lead economist for the Climate and Energy Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, in a statement. “President-elect Trump ran a brutish campaign that disregarded or misrepresented scientific facts, while promising to boost fossil fuel companies' fortunes,” she said.

Still, the groups say they seek a kernel of hope in the fact that many states have set decarbonization goals and targets. Voters in [Washington state held off a conservative challenge on Nov. 5](#) to repeal a groundbreaking 2022 climate law that sets a cap on major sources of greenhouse gas emissions, with credits purchased by emitters used to fund climate-friendly projects. Advocates also note that

infrastructure projects funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act are popular not just in Democratic-leaning states, but also in solidly Republican ones. Texas is a leader in U.S. onshore wind and solar energy construction.

“There is no denying that another Trump presidency will stall national efforts to tackle the climate crisis and protect the environment, but most U.S. state, local, and private sector leaders are committed to charging ahead,” Dan Lashof, U.S. director of the World Resources Institute, said in a statement.

Nathaniel Keohane, president of the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, said that the clean energy economy is here to stay. “Thanks to policies with bipartisan support that are channeling investment into clean tech innovation and deployment, we are on the cusp of a more prosperous future: one where abundant zero-carbon energy sources like wind, solar and nuclear enhance America’s security, where investments in clean energy manufacturing create good jobs, and where the technologies that will power the economy of tomorrow—small modular reactors, clean hydrogen, sustainable aviation fuel, advanced batteries and so many others—are invented and deployed here in the U.S. and exported around the world.”

Some clean energy groups issued statements that credit some progress made during the last Trump administration, and couch sector benefits to U.S. energy security and manufacturing dominance.

American Clean Power Association CEO Jason Gromet said he “looks forward to working with the Trump-Vance administration to unleash American-made energy, deliver reliable power to the grid, grow the economy and enhance our national security.” Oceantic Network President and CEO Liz Burdock, chief of the leading advocacy group for the U.S. offshore wind industry—a main Trump target—said the first Trump administration oversaw three federal lease sales that netted \$456 million for the federal treasury.” Industry responded, she said, “by making the first supply chain investments that are now creating jobs in Texas and South Carolina.”

But its officials also failed to move on projects lined up for approval, with action not taken until the Biden administration. It has since signed off on 10 commercial scale offshore wind projects totaling 15 GW with other approvals possible before the new administration takes office. Despite strong state support to complete approved projects, there is speculation about the future of needed supply chain manufacturing investment and about impacts of opponent lawsuits.

Environmental groups chagrined with the election outcome say they will rev up their potent legal arsenals and warchests—vowing to fight attempts by the incoming administration to roll back environmental protections and clean energy development as was done in the previous Trump term.

Said Earthjustice President Abigail Dillen: “We will see Donald Trump in court.”

KEYWORDS: [2024 election campaign](#) [Donald Trump](#) [Energy Policy](#) [Environmental regulations](#)

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Pam is ENR's senior editor for government coverage, focusing on federal environmental and labor issues as they relate to the construction industry. She has a degree in journalism and an M.A. in writing fiction, and has worked previously as both an editor at ENR (2007-2016) and as a freelancer for a variety of publications and clients. One of her favorite gigs involved writing about stars, black holes and the mysteries of the universe for NASA.



As ENR Editor-at-Large for Energy, Business and Workforce, Debra K. Rubin has a broad vantage for news, issues and trends in global engineering and construction related to key areas of global energy development and transition, corporate business and management, regulation and risk and next-generation workforce development.

Debra also launched and manages **ENR's Top 200 Environmental Firms** annual ranking, which defines key players in the dynamic global market for environmental services; and is editor of *ENR WorkforceToday* e-newsletter on industry talent management news and trends. [Click here](#) to receive this free monthly newsletter.

She also is a key organizer of ENR's annual **Groundbreaking Women in Construction** conference, a major AEC industry forum for talent management and women's career advancement. [Click here](#) for more detail on plans in formation for the next live event.

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