

Leah Stokes:

Hi, Katharine.

Katharine Wilkinson:

Hi, Leah.

Leah Stokes:

How are you holding up?

Katharine Wilkinson:

I feel pretty shattered from the results of the election. Heartbroken, definitely scared. This is not a good outcome for people and the planet, and I am still trying to make sense of it all.

Leah Stokes:

I am too. I've spent my life working on climate change, and Donald Trump calls the climate crisis a scam and a hoax. The most disturbing thing is that he has detailed plans to grind climate progress to a halt, as we talked about on our recent episode on Project 2025. So he is a threat to so much of what we have worked so hard for.

Katharine Wilkinson:

And I am feeling this for all of that climate progress and all the climate progress we needed to make in the next administration, but so much more. He ran on a platform of grievance, hate, division, and it's really terrifying to think of all the harms that communities are going to face in the coming years.

Leah Stokes:

There is a lot on the line, and if there's one thing that's clear, it's that we have our work cut out for us.

Katharine Wilkinson:

There's a lot of work ahead, but I think it's also worth just before we jump into strategy and tactics to take a pause, to feel the rage, the grief, the fear, to connect with each other, to build community, and to try to wrap our hearts and minds around the situation we now find ourselves in.

Leah Stokes:

That's such an important point, Katharine, because whatever the next steps are, we have to take them together as a United Climate Movement.

Katharine Wilkinson:

We need each other more than ever, and the All We Can Save project released a facilitation guide for those who want to come together in community to process this moment, to try to make sense of what happened. And we've got a link for that resource in the show notes.

Leah Stokes:

So today we're going to attempt some of that sense making by trying to understand what just happened last week and what the election means for the future of our planet. And to do that, I sat down with my good friend, Adrian Deveny, for a live event at UC Santa Barbara just after the election.

Adrian spent 13 years working in the United States Senate most recently as the director of Energy and Environmental Policy for Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. In that role, he led the negotiations for the Inflation Reduction Act, which is the largest climate investment in American history, but he also worked on so many other bills, including the bipartisan infrastructure law, and even an energy policy passed at the end of the Trump administration. Since leaving Congress, Adrian has founded Climate Vision, which works with nonprofits and businesses to help figure out what's next when it comes to climate policy.

Katharine Wilkinson:

I feel like Adrian was one of the very best people to sit down and have this conversation with, Leah, because he helped deliver the biggest policy wins of the last decade, and he also worked in Congress during that first Trump term. So he probably knows better than anyone how climate action gets done and undone in Washington.

Leah Stokes:

So in this episode, Adrian and I take a deep dive into what a second Trump term will mean for climate policy, how we can continue to make progress even with him in office and defend the wins we have worked so hard for.

Katharine Wilkinson:

Let's get into it.

Leah Stokes:

Well, thank you so much for coming. I'm sure a lot of you are feeling a lot of feelings right now. You're going through the stages of grief and of course, because we live in Southern California and there was a red flag warning, there's also a fire happening on top of everything else. So I just want to say that we're very grateful for you to be here. And at least my intention is that this will not be a depressing conversation, that it will be a inspiring and uplifting and mobilizing conversation. And that's how I'm starting to feel already, honestly. That being said, the things that we're going to talk about today are climate policy.

That's what Adrian and I fixate our lives towards. And funny enough, Adrian and I have known each other for 15 years because in 2009 we met doing a summer internship at Resources for the Future and Environmental Economics Think Tank in DC. So we've been doing this a long time, that's why we have gray hairs now, but there are lots of people who dedicate their lives to other issues that really matter, like a woman's right to choose, like undocumented people's rights in this country, like our democracy. And those are things that are under deep threat right now. When we hear people talk about a national abortion ban or mass deportations or undermining our bedrock democratic institutions, those are very scary. And the next four years are going to be very challenging, particularly the next two years is what I would say because we will have a midterm election where the Senate map is quite good for the Democrats.

So I don't want to minimize any of those things. We're going to talk about the climate part of this equation, which I know is what so many people here also spend their lives devoted to. And I think that

there will be some really devastating losses in that fight in the next four years. But I am not a hundred percent gloom and doom. I mean that honestly, and that's not just my mental orientation. I think that there's lots of potential in this scenario as well. So the stakes are very high right now, and I don't want to minimize that.

But what I want to do today with you Adrian, is we're going to go on a five-year journey, okay? We're going to time travel and we're going to start here in the last 72 hours of the election and try to understand where we are in this moment. And then I want to take us through to 2029 and what it's going to look like then. And of course that's when our next presidential election is, and it's probably our next big opportunity for a big climate bill. And Adrian and I are the kind of people who obsess with windows of opportunity for a big climate bill. And so my mind is already on 2029.

So I'm going to bring you all on that mental journey with us, and I'm sure we'll get many things wrong because I thought Kamala Harris was going to win a few days ago. In fairness, Adrian did not as much. So we get things right, we get things wrong, but it's really important to have a vision of where we could be going and not just be paralyzed by grief.

So let's talk about what happened this week. I want you to say, Adrian, what do you think this election was about? You and I have obviously talked about this. Adrian made the questionable decision to spend the election with me at my house. And so we had breakfast the next morning and debriefed it. So I want you to share with more than just me, what do you think this election was about and some of the stories in your own personal life that point you towards, what do you think this election, why it went the way it did?

Adrian Deveny:

Sure. Well, first of all, thank you for having me here. It's been a real joy to be here with you and to process what has been a very difficult week. I'm sure everyone struggled to get out of bed. And so a lot of appreciation to all of you to even come to this event tonight and to think through all of this with us because it's a little bit of a heady talk, but it's also an important mechanism for all of us to both process what just happened and also start dusting off and gearing up for the fight ahead of us. And it's going to be a long fight. And look, everyone who works on climate almost by definition, what you're signing up for is a lifelong commitment to a fight that's going to take a lot of twists and turns and have its dark moments.

We're certainly in one of those right now, but there's always going to be new opportunities that emerge for progress. And there's always going to be moments where we have to play defense and do both at all times is the name of the game. So my own interpretation, for what it's worth, of what just happened, and look, I'm the type of person, well, first of all, I am less optimistically predisposed as Leah is in general, so I'll try to not be too much of a bummer during this talk. Maybe she revealed my disposition by my assumptions of what was going to happen on this election. But look, we all saw that there were big shifts across the country in terms of the demographic trends towards President Trump, and a lot of it was the working class voters. And when we think about what is front of mind for a lot of people across the country right now, and what is it that they're really voting on, it's things that are related to their immediate needs or the needs of what they've experienced in the last several years.

And to the extent that they're going through struggles, they're going to be assigning blame to certain politicians of one party or the other for those struggles. And what did we just go through the last four years? We had some incredible wins and the Biden administration had some incredible successes, but a lot of people have been struggling across the country. If you go back starting with COVID, I was telling Leah about a few friends of mine who they had businesses that were decimated by COVID. One friend

who was in the entertainment business, and he was providing entertainment for weddings and the wedding industry shut down during COVID. And so he lost his business, went bankrupt, and went from being a lifelong Democrat to a Trump supporter. I had another friend who had a business in martial arts and nobody was sending their kids to martial arts during the pandemic, and he went from being a Democrat to a Trump supporter.

These are working class people who had been not involved in politics at all, but they were predisposed to be supporting Democrats. And those shutdowns affected certain people more than others. And a lot of us that work in the DC area, to the extent we work in government or government adjacent industries, were really insulated from a lot of those effects of COVID. Our jobs were still relatively stable. We were able to work remotely. Not to say we weren't impacted, but some people, it really upended their lives. And that memory lingers with those people, and they didn't really have a chance to vote on that issue in 2022. A lot of those folks just didn't vote in 2022. So this was really the election where they expressed their critique of the system for the first time and how they voted for president.

So to me, this election was in part about COVID, was in part about the economic ripple effects that came out of COVID with inflation as well. Bread and butter issues are really important to most people, and being able to meet the needs of your family really is core to how a lot of people think about their own wellbeing. And we have to not lose sight of that when we think about what really matters to the majority of people and how do we meet people where they are. When we think about building campaigns, building allies across the movement to reach working class people. To me, being aware that these kitchen table issues are always going to be centrally important, is really essential. So that's basically my analysis.

My analysis on the flip side is that there were a lot of issues that this campaign was not about, that this election was not about, and climate is one of them. Back during the 2010 election, which was a big tea party wave where Republicans swept back in control of the House of Representatives after President Obama had been elected. The issue on people's minds back then, one of the issues was their vote on the Waxman-Markey Bill that passed the House of Representatives but did not pass in the Senate. And a lot of house members attribute their campaign loss to that vote.

And we aren't seeing that with this election. We aren't seeing members of Congress or Vice President Harris or pundits saying the climate was the reason that anybody lost and that the Inflation Reduction Act was the reason that anybody lost. In fact, there were people that were running on that. Now, that wasn't a central issue that most people were running on, but on a parochial level, you did see some candidates running on specific wins from those bills. And clean energy as an issue related to affordability and cost of living appeared in many ads in many swing states at the presidential level, Senate race level. So it was actually seen as an asset in this campaign, but not a central asset, but it was an asset. So that means that what we have identified is a formula for success, electoral success and policy design success going forward. And that that is a model to build off of.

Leah Stokes:

Yeah. And a really big trend, which I'm sure people have seen and was certainly the case going into this election, but I wanted to ignore it, is that incumbents are losing around the world. In political science, we have a very canonical finding, which is that incumbents have an advantage. They tend to win. Well, that is not the case this year, and that is because regardless of what parties in power, if it's a left-wing party or a right-wing party, people are mad about inflation. And inflation is a global phenomenon coming out of the COVID pandemic. It's a dynamic of the fact that everybody was stuck inside for a while, and then there was a big surge in demand, and all the supply chain bottlenecks created this

inflation. So this is something that we're seeing around the world. And when people say, "Well, did Harris lose because she was a woman or a woman of color?"

I don't want to minimize that, but I want to just point out some facts, which is that she actually over-performed in swing states. So the places where she was campaigning, the losses were less bad. And that wasn't just, oh, great, we lost by less. Well, believe it or not, there were critical Senate races in those places, in Michigan, in Wisconsin, in Nevada. I went to bed thinking that we had lost those Senate seats and woke up to the joyous information that we had not. And I think that's very attributable to the Harris campaign work. And if she hadn't run, I don't think that we'd be in the same place. And winning those Senate seats is really important because they're on six year cycles. So if you lose them, you're not getting them back. In fact, it's slower moving than even the presidency, right?

So you can feel really sad that we're not going to have a woman president. I know I feel that. But I think you have to remember, she was running for like 108 days and Donald Trump was running for three cycles straight. And the name recognition, what she had up against her was so hard. It was really hard. And she actually did very well in the macro conditions, which is that every incumbent's getting voted out at everywhere. And then the places where she was campaigning, they lost by three points as opposed to the overall six points swing. So it sucks that we lost, I mean, I'm a Democrat, I'll just say that personally, but we actually lost by a lot less, and that mattered for the Senate map. So I just want to remind people.

Adrian Deveny:

And the house map as well.

Leah Stokes:

And the house map, yeah.

Adrian Deveny:

Wisconsin, I just point to as a really good case study in how much organizing matters because that gap was compared to non-swing states where we had a really robust ground campaign was about a five point difference, and Wisconsin was really a case study in one of the best on the ground campaigns in any of the swing states. So the field game matters a whole lot, and we salvaged the Senate race there in large part because of that.

Leah Stokes:

Yeah. And if you were somebody who made calls or went door knocking, don't feel that it didn't matter. It actually mattered a lot. And the losses are less bad. The house hasn't even been decided yet. It looks like it's going to go to the Republicans, but by very narrow margins. And these things matter a lot for how much damage we can see in the next two years. So let's now, we're time traveling, right? We have to move slightly faster on our trip.

Adrian Deveny:

Okay, yeah, we'll move faster. Pick up the pace.

Leah Stokes:

So we've got 74 days until inauguration is what you told me yesterday. I assume you're correct. So what do we have to do in the next 74 days? And different people will have different things to do, but what are you thinking about when it comes to climate progress in the next 74 days?

Adrian Deveny:

Yeah, so one of the unfortunate aspects of the protracted negotiation of the Inflation Reduction Act, it took a lot longer than it should have in part because COVID derailed us for a period of time. We had to work on COVID bills. We also had to then do a lengthy negotiation through Congress that was much longer than it needed be. But what that means is that the administration, the Biden administration has had a lot less time to implement that bill than we would've liked. And getting that money out the door is critical because any unspent money is at risk of not ever getting spent. So you can expect that priority one across all of the federal agencies that received money from the Inflation Reduction Act will be to implement that as quickly as possible and get money out the door. The good news is that they have already been working at lightning speed for federal agencies, which is not really lightning speed, but they're moving as fast as they can.

And so they really have gotten a lot of money out the door. Really, I would argue, a surprising amount of money out the door for such a short time period. But the pressure they will now be under to move even faster over the course of the next few months is going to be very intense. And you can imagine that a lot of outside groups are going to be really ratcheting up that pressure as well. So that's one thing. There's going to be a regulatory agenda. They've been doing a lot of regulations already on pollution of all kinds as well as conservation measures. And there are, I would imagine, and this happens actually in every lame duck session basically, where you see a whole slew of new executive actions in the regulatory domain happen. So I'd expect to see a lot of those. Some of that stuff is legacy stuff that customarily a new president would not roll back. Things like national monuments, for example, oftentimes aren't reversed. I wouldn't necessarily assume that President Trump would preserve that custom.

Leah Stokes:

Well, he didn't last time.

Adrian Deveny:

Because he didn't last time. So I think we have some evidence to point to them not necessarily preserving that custom, but the intensity of public attention that it gets and debate and discourse that it has, the more scrutiny it has, the more likely it is to be reversed. The thing is that one thing that people don't realize is that there are so much work that executive agencies do, much of which doesn't ever get any public attention, much of which does not make it into the news. A lot of the small stuff will stick just because it goes unnoticed, honestly. So that's not the best consolation prize, but the truth is the strategy is to throw everything at this, to throw all the spaghetti at the wall and hoping that you can get as much to stick as possible.

Leah Stokes:

Yeah, there are civil servants working in the IRS, in the White House, in the DOE and EPA who have already been working very long hours for months and years, and that's only going to ratchet up. So I just have a lot of gratitude to people who do this work, largely unsung. And I just want to flag another thing that the Biden administration could do, which is the LNG terminals that they have paused for scientific review. Those are things that they could stop, and that wouldn't necessarily be that easy to change course afterwards because at least under the current democratic system, assuming you don't break it, assuming you don't color outside of the lines, which when we start thinking about anti-democratic institutions, we have to start thinking about coloring outside of the lines, but let's say you do follow the rules and norms of our system, regulations can't just be thrown out. They get finalized.

And even when, for example, Trump wanted to get rid of the Clean Power Plan, he had to do his own rule, I think it was called ACE, American Clean Energy or something like this.

Adrian Deveny:

Right.

Leah Stokes:

So they have to go through a whole process of doing their own rules. It's not like it's just an instant change. Much like the unfortunate hangover of appointing judges, these things that an administration does, they have longer tails, and that's also why it's very important that Biden get all those judges appointed when there are vacancies. That's another thing that they can do. So it's going to be a busy couple of months.

Adrian Deveny:

One thing that the environmental community is very good at and has a lot of experience doing is litigation on regulations. The environmental community is less good at defending big victories on climate policy because we haven't actually passed very many climate bills in history.

Leah Stokes:

We have no practice.

Adrian Deveny:

Practicing defending a big investment package, there's not a lot of muscle memory for that. But on the regulatory side, there are just a ton of organizations with exceptional lawyers who have an incredible track record of success catching any sloppiness. Certainly this played out in the first term of the Trump administration where they did try to roll back regulations and they got tripped up on administrative procedures, and we had smart lawyers taking them to court. So that's going to happen again, that is gearing up, and the environmental groups are quite good at that.

Leah Stokes:

So now we're time traveling to 2025. We didn't have to live through those 74 days, we just prognosticated and then they passed. So we're now in 2025. Trump is being inaugurated. This is the thing about a democracy, right? You have to accept the results, or at least almost all of us accept the results, except for that one time. So there'll be an inauguration, a peaceful transfer of power, we hope, and then we're in the wilderness, so to speak. So let's talk about what we could expect in the Trump administration, and I got a bunch of things that we're going to talk through, but the first one is defending the Inflation Reduction Act. Obviously a personal thing for both of us, as well as an important thing for the world. Where's your head at in terms of what you think about the Inflation Reduction Act?

And I want to also say that since Adrian was so key to designing the Inflation Reduction Act, one of the theories that I know you had, because we obviously talked about it, was an industrial policy theory. What do we mean by that? We mean that if you actually make stuff in America like solar panels and electric vehicles and batteries, and you have jobs here in this country and those jobs flow to Republican and rural districts, it'll be much harder to repeal that policy. If instead we had gone forward with a carbon tax for example, or cap and trade, you don't have beneficiaries in the same way to make the policy sticky.

And with, for example, the Clean Economy Tracker, they show that I think 74% of these investments have been flowing to Republican districts. And you already have, I think 20 members of Congress, Republican House members saying that they don't want to repeal at least parts of the tax credits under the Inflation Reduction Act. So your theory is at least already bearing some fruit. But what do you think is really the way to think about defending the progress that we've already made?

Adrian Deveny:

To build on that, I'll try to not be pessimistic as best as I can. So that kind of growth of political power grows the more time it has to build in the economy. So just to be specific, roughly a little over \$270 billion of clean energy manufacturing facilities has been announced across the country since the Inflation Reduction Act passed. And that's a remarkable number, but of that, only about 480 billion of those investments are under construction. And I don't know that any of them are fully constructed. There was a few that were expansions of existing facilities, so you can count those jobs. But the reason I mentioned that is that members care a lot, and by members, I mean members of Congress, they care a lot about manufacturing jobs more than just about any kind of job. When there's a manufacturing facility in your district or in your state that employs 2000 people, you defend that to the death. That's just the norm in Congress.

But those facilities have to be employing those people. And so the promise of those jobs is good, and we will work with what we have, but a lot of those facilities aren't yet built, aren't yet employing people. And so the timing of this and the sequence of it really does matter because the faster those facilities get built, the better chance we have to really build a case to members to defend certain policies within the Inflation Reduction Act on a parochial basis, on the basis of protecting jobs in their state and in their district. And that's going to be really important to the stickiness of those policies. There are some members in the Republican Party who do care about climate to a degree, but they care a lot more about cutting taxes mostly for rich people. And so they're going to need to find ways to pay for that.

A question I often get is, well, what about republicans that have said we want to protect some of the clean energy tax credits? There was a letter signed by 18 members of Congress of the House who generically said, don't repeal the tax credits and the Inflation Reduction Act. And that's all fine and good in isolation, but when they're put in a position to vote for a bill that delivers on President Trump's agenda of tax cuts for the wealthy, and one of the pay-fors for that, one of the ways they're paying for those tax cuts is by cutting the Inflation Reduction Act tax credits, that's a different decision. That's a different calculus that those members will have to make.

And so our job playing defense is to make it as hard as possible. Having really tight margins in the House, if the House margin is only three members or four members, then the name of the game is to pick off three or four members on as many provisions as possible on their side. And so that's very doable for some provisions, and it's going to be really hard for others, but that's how you win.

Leah Stokes:

Yeah. What we're going to probably see next year is a tax bill through budget reconciliation, right? Because the Republicans don't have 60 votes in the Senate and the Trump tax cuts are expiring. And so there will be a big package like Adrian was talking about. It'll include tax cuts for the wealthy because that's a really important thing to do. That was sarcasm. And also it might include some gutting of these clean energy policies. Now, the one thing is that Adrian and I, having lived trying to get the IRA passed through budget reconciliation with these narrow margins in the Senate, know how hard that was. It is very hard to pass a law in the United States for any party. And again, from political science, what we

know is that the system tends towards status quo, towards stasis, that it's easier to not do something than to do something.

So just because they have those trifectas, with those narrow margins, it's still going to be really, really hard for them to get everybody to agree. I mean, you saw how difficult it was for the Republicans to pick a speaker of the house and how long they each survived. So being able to get all those people lined up is going to be a really challenging thing. And as Adrian said, the name of the game is throwing sand in the gears and trying to get a couple more folks to go with you. And I think a lot about John McCain, for example, who believed in climate change and was actually a climate advocate going and voting the thumbs down for the Affordable Care Act. And that really, yes-

Adrian Deveny:

For the repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

Leah Stokes:

Yes, sorry. For the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, exactly. That they talked forever about how they were going to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. And you can say, well, that was an idiosyncratic moment and it was just one vote and one guy, but that's actually the pattern in political science that laws are sticky. So we're going to make it even harder for them. But you shouldn't just assume that everything is gone and everything is lost. The grants will hopefully mostly be out the door, and then it'll be the tax credits. And the nice thing about the tax credits is that they benefit businesses and businesses have a unfortunately louder voice than everyday Americans, and so they can be there to defend these policies.

So I want to also talk about things we could be thinking about proactively. You got some wins during the first Trump administration legislatively, and I know Al Gore, for example, put out a message yesterday saying that for those of us who work in climate, this is a dark day and there are dark days in any movement, but we also have to think about what progress we can still make.

And for example, are there things that could be done in a bipartisan way? Of course, the bipartisan infrastructure law was done in the Biden-Harris administration in a bipartisan way, and then the energy law was done in 2020 under the Trump administration in a bipartisan way. So right now it would probably be the Republican trifecta. But do you think there are opportunities still to make some progress, not just defending against retrenchment and rollback, but also some forward momentum? And I'll just say too, that Al Gore quoted Martin Luther King Jr. and said that if you can't fly walk, and if you can't walk crawl. And so can we crawl at all, is the question.

Adrian Deveny:

Yeah, we can always crawl. And there are-

Leah Stokes:

It works really well with the timeline of climate action, super well.

Adrian Deveny:

Yeah. Yeah. Climate action, you go from being a baby crawling to being a grownup sprinting, and then suddenly you revert back to a baby crawling again. It's weird how that works. But here we are, back to crawling and yeah, most of my formative years working in Congress on policy, were in the wilderness in the sense that we didn't have a democratic trifecta. I started in Congress in 2010 right after Waxman-

Markey fell apart, so I didn't even get to work on that bill. So it really was the wilderness then. And we were trying to think about what things that we could try to do on a bipartisan basis bit by bit. And look, just to be clear, I don't want to understate the magnitude of how far behind we are on meeting our climate targets.

We are very far behind. Even if we were able to preserve the full Inflation Reduction Act, even if we were to have gotten a democratic trifecta, to meet our 2030 goals, we would've had to have passed another IRA sized bill next year to be on track to meet our 2030 goals. To be on track to meet our 2035 goals. We would've had to pass a bill two to three times the size of the IRA next year to meet our 2035 goals. So we're not on the right trajectory. We weren't even on the right trajectory in an optimistic scenario, we were working our butts off to be prepared to move something if we got that window of opportunity, but that's not where we are.

And so you always have to make progress however you can because the truth about climate is that doing nothing is not an option. And every ton reduced is a future that's a little less bad. And so we always have to fight to eke out every ton that we can is at least the way I approach it. And so there are in any Congress going to always be opportunities for some amount of progress. And you're also going to face some losses. I think on net, at least in the next two years, given that the Republicans have a trifecta on the way that the emissions are going to net out, it's going to be net negative in terms of emissions reductions.

Leah Stokes:

By negative, we mean-

Adrian Deveny:

Negative in the bad direction, but that doesn't mean you can't offset some of those losses by some small wins. And so where I look for opportunities are there are always must pass legislative vehicles in any Congress that things that just have to pass every year as a matter of course. So there is always a federal budget bill, it's called an appropriations bill that every year has to pass. Every year there is a defense authorization bill that has to pass. Those two don't seem all that notable, but in fact, they are. The Department of Energy in years where Republicans have had a trifecta or even have any amount of power, what they always fight for is moving money away from deployment accounts and into R&D accounts. And so the whole negotiation space is around for Democrats, how can you maximize money going into R&D for climate tech, clean tech, and also preserving as much of the deployment money as possible.

In the defense bill, the Department of Defense is the biggest energy consumer in the world. There's huge opportunities in terms of defense procurement, in terms of catalyzing new climate tech that you can tuck into that bill and has often enjoyed bipartisan support actually. So I look to those kinds of opportunities. I look to just innovation policy generally as an opportunity. Republicans did work with us on the Chips and Science bill, and most people focus on the Chips side of the Chips and Science bill, which provided big incentives to semiconductor chip manufacturers in the United States. But actually the and Science part of that bill was really important. That was the part that I worked on. And what that bill provided was a huge increase in funding for NSF research support mostly to academic institutions with certain identified priority areas of research with energy being one of them.

And we didn't even fund that bill at the level that generally felt necessary. We were benchmarking against the levels that China invests in R&D domestically, and it was always viewed as a competitiveness bill. And so when you frame things under that banner of competitiveness with countries like China,

there's really a lot of bipartisan appetite to do more in that space, whether it be on the R&D side or whether it be on shoring up industrial manufacturing in this country like chips manufacturing, you could imagine something similar for the steel industry as well. And there's obviously big opportunities on not just shoring up steel in this country, steel manufacturing, but clean steel.

So those are just a couple examples, but there are always going to be unexpected opportunities that pop up too. In the 2020 appropriations bill, not only did we attach the Energy Act of 2020 to that bill, I remember when I shared the text of that bill to my immediate supervisor in the Schumer office, our legislative director, and she was like, "What the hell is this?" Because it was longer than the appropriations bill itself. It was hundreds of pages long. And she was like, "You want us to attach this behemoth to the appropriations bill?" I was like, "Yes. Yes, I do, because we have bipartisan support, so we're going to do it."

And that was really cool. But in addition to that bill, we also attached the AIM Act. And the AIM Act was an interesting one because it was a cap and trade program for phasing out HFCs. And in some ways I was actually more excited about that because the notion that we would be passing a bill that was a cap and trade bill to phase out HFCs under a Republican president with a Republican controlled Senate, I would've thought that was crazy five years ago having experienced the aftermath of Waxman-Markey. But the reason why we were able to get support, bipartisan support for it was that the entry point for Republicans had nothing really to do with climate at all. It had to do with competitiveness. Again, it was the domestic manufacturers who went to Republicans to say, this is about competition with China. This puts us at a competitive advantage relative to our competitors in China by passing this legislation. And so we were able to pass it. And that had a really meaningful impact. So I sometimes think of things as singles and doubles, and that was a double to me.

Leah Stokes:

We're in sports metaphors. So that's where I stopped understanding the conversation.

Adrian Deveny:

Yeah. Well.

Leah Stokes:

I'll just say, when people were saying run through the tape in the last week, I thought it was like a VHS tape that you were pulling out. I straight up did not understand that was a running metaphor. I'm learning my sports metaphors every day. And I just want to also say if people watch the VP debate with Tim Walz and JD Vance, there was a very strange moment on this point about competitiveness, where JD Vance was like, "Well, if you were serious about the climate crisis, you would've built clean energy manufacturing in America." And we were all like, I'm sorry, what? Is this man trying to explain the Inflation Reduction Act back to us? And of course, it's not that I believe things that are said by people who lie constantly because I don't, but it's an interesting point that competitiveness, manufacturing jobs, if people are serious about these things, then maybe we won't have a huge gutting of the progress we've already made, and there might be some spaces for these unexpected wins.

I just also want to say that this is why it's such a blessing that Adrian spent so much of his life doing this work at great personal sacrifice. When you have a job like the one that Adrian held for Senator Schumer, you work every weekend and you work evenings, and he has children and Adrian and I have talked a lot about this, it was very hard. He didn't take a paternity leave for months on end to try to get these things done. And so I just want to also say gratitude to you that you tried to make these things happen, not just

in the Trump administration, but also in the Biden-Harris administration. And I hope that's an inspiration to other people that Adrian's a mortal. He's not even a senator or anything. He's just a human. And you too can have huge impacts with the work that you dedicate yourself to doing even in dark times like these.

Adrian Deveny:

Yeah, and we especially need people like you to do this work because one experience that I found having worked in politics for many years is that you get different types of people attracted to that line of work. And there are certainly people who are attracted to it for more cynical reasons. And it really is important to have people who come with a background and expertise on the actual subject matter and who are grounded in science and have a real mission and a drive to change the world for the better.

And there are all different types of people who work on climate policy in Congress, even on our side, and people come into it for all kinds of different reasons. And so I always just encourage young people to consider that line of work, even in dark times such as these. In some ways, these are some of the best times to get into it because often you see an exodus of people leaving, and so it is a window of opportunity to get your foot in the door oftentimes. And really, it's so important to have people who are grounded with a north star of why you're doing that work, that it's to accomplish an actual purpose and to solve the climate rather than to just amass power or whatever other people's motivations are.

Leah Stokes:

This is my master theory of people in DC. Two types of people, one type of people mission-oriented people, second type of person power-oriented people. Adrian is type one. So we got a couple more decades or years to get through here. The time travel, it's like back to the future. We're going fast in the little car in the '80s. So how do we resist? Right? That's another moment that we're talking about right now. Maybe you've read parts of Project 2025. We did an episode of this podcast recently on that. It's a dark document. It talks about gutting the National Weather Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, removing all mentions of climate change from the federal government. What do you think are some of the ways that we can resist those kinds of rollbacks, not just the IRA, but other kinds of damage?

Adrian Deveny:

Oh boy. I keep trying to figure out how to be positive here.

Leah Stokes:

You're never going to rival my positivity. It's just a genetic thing. You don't have it.

Adrian Deveny:

Yeah, yeah. Well, a lot of it I think is untested is the real answer. And we don't know what exactly that they will try to do because Project 2025 is one thing, but the decisions on personnel is they say personnel is policy. And so whether they do bring in the Project 2025 people or not is going to matter. I suspect many of those folks will join the Trump administration, but there will be all kinds of other people. There will be campaign staff from the Trump campaign who will have no idea what they're doing, and will make all kinds of mistakes.

The Republican infrastructure as it is is as diverse as the democratic infrastructure in the sense that you get people from all different stripes and people fall along a broad spectrum of worldviews. It's not

monolithic at all. And so you end up seeing things actually happen in weird pockets. So you'll see a lot of deconstruction and destruction happen very intensely in certain pockets because you'll have very capable people who end up getting hired in certain areas of the government and then very incapable people in other areas.

Leah Stokes:

So we're rooting for the incompetent people on the climate file.

Adrian Deveny:

And just to be a little bit more specific about it, I hesitate to get too specific about it, but Elon Musk is a character in many ways, but he's out there talking about how he's going to start the Department of Government Efficiency. And I find that an interesting concept because it reveals that he hasn't really made any effort into understanding how the federal government works. To start a new department actually requires an act of Congress that would require not... You can't do that through budget reconciliation really, though maybe they could try, but even that would be very challenging. It would require spending a lot of money. It would take several years to stand up. It would create a whole new bureaucracy, ironically.

And he has no awareness seemingly that there are entities within the government already who both do the thing he's describing and also who are real roadblocks to the thing he's describing. Nobody has bothered to mention to him any of that, it seems. So he's a smart guy. I am not going to take that away from him. It's just that's not where his area of expertise lies at all. And yet somehow he has this vision of treating the federal government as a corporation, and the federal government is not governed as a corporation. It has a whole separate set of laws that really make the type of change that he envisions very, very difficult. And there have been many, many decades of budget hawks and people on the Republican side who've wanted to do exactly what he is envisioning and who are much more sophisticated, by the way, about how the federal government works and who have failed.

So they're going to bring in a whole range of different types of people, like I said, and some of them will know what they're doing and others won't. And so we just can't really know how it's going to play out, but it's going to be chaotic.

Leah Stokes:

Yeah. I just also want to remind people that there are very talented lawyers who work at places like Earth Justice and NRDC. Abby Dillon was talking yesterday about how Earth Justice, which grew a lot in the wake of the 2016 election, defended against all these Trump rollbacks, won 85% of cases where they sued the federal government. And one thing that happens when we lose is that more energy goes into our movement actually in a counterintuitive way, and more money goes in. And so there may actually be a renewed energy in our movement. I want to do just one minute on a topic that if we don't talk about our friends will be annoyed at us. So this is a shout-out to our friends, Caroline Spears and Sam Ricketts who both texted us that we had to talk about the states because obsessed with the States. What about the states? Not really your area, but do you find some opportunities there? What do you think?

Adrian Deveny:

Oh man, I didn't read his texts. So I'm not-

Leah Stokes:

You didn't read his text.

Adrian Deveny:

Going to a good job, but I'll give my own spiel.

Leah Stokes:

It was his state's propaganda. Yeah.

Adrian Deveny:

So often what happens in these moments where you have Republican takeover of the federal government is that a lot of the advocacy campaign infrastructure shifts to state work and local work and international work, because that's where they see the real opportunities for progress. That is good and bad. On the one hand, there's still a lot of need to do continued federal defense work. As we said, there are some opportunities for progress that are meaningful and real. And sometimes, I've certainly experienced in my former job the sucking sound of all the external support resources that you really do rely on when you are a staffer in Congress, that when it's not there, it makes your job a lot harder. But it is also true that the state progress is incredibly important for several reasons. One reason is that it just delivers tons. I mean, when you can get emissions reductions from the fifth-largest economy, California, in the world, it's meaningful. It's a lot of emissions reductions. And so it matters for its own sake. It often will have a secondary effect where a lot of other states will adopt those policies.

And then also that state progress provided the foundation for what we saw in the 2020 campaign. Governor Jay Inslee ran on his climate record in Washington, developed a plan that was largely built off of what he had accomplished in the state of Washington for his own climate plan when he was running for president. A lot of other candidates then were copying his ideas and other ideas that were coming out of states that were successful. They talk about the laboratory of democracy and that state policy progress is so important because the federal government can really draw on those successes when we do get those moments of opportunity

Leah Stokes:

Yeah. Just in California alone, next year there's going to be a cap and trade renegotiation, and they have their own greenhouse gas reduction fund here in California, and it's about maybe 5 billion. It could be more depending on the decisions they make. How do we want to spend that money? Do we want to do building decarb, electrify the transportation sector? What are the priorities? Electrify our heavy industry. So there's still things that can be done. Okay, we got two more topics we want to cover. So we're in 2029. We've survived. We didn't die along the way. It was good. It was like, what is that? The Oregon Trail. We didn't get dysentery.

Adrian Deveny:

Dysentery.

Leah Stokes:

None of that happened. We made it-

Adrian Deveny:

Across the river without drowning.

Leah Stokes:

To the promised land. Yeah, we're in 2029. What have we done with our time in the wilderness to allow us to be ready for this hypothetical democratic trifecta and this big opportunity for climate bill?

Adrian Deveny:

So we had the unfortunate benefit in the lead up to Build Back Better and the Inflation Reduction Act of having had over a decade of policy development ideas really off the shelf ready to go. We obviously had to make a lot of tweaks to those ideas and modify the strategy to fit within a reconciliation package. But it was many years of policy iteration that allowed us to have as robust of a package that we did in the Inflation Reduction Act. And so what came after the Inflation Reduction Act was primarily a focus on implementation, which was important. But in the spring of this year, we realized we really needed to get our act together to be prepared, if we had a really good scenario in November that we would be prepared. And my philosophy at least, is that anytime there's a non-zero chance of a historic opportunity, you better be well-prepared for it. And so most of my time this year was spent on being prepared for good scenarios and having a range of policy ideas ready to go-

Leah Stokes:

So you're ready for 2029.

Adrian Deveny:

For those. But the truth is is that that was a nine-month scramble of identifying what are the emissions gaps that still remain. I mentioned at the high level that we had still a very large gap between what our IRA trajectory was relative to our 2030 target. It was about another IRA-sized bill. But at a granular level, I mean, we had to identify, what are the specific gaps? In the industrial sector, for example, we were way behind. We did very little in the Inflation Reduction Act in the industrial sector. And so it's not just one policy for the industrial sector. You have to even deconstruct the industrial sector into component parts with policies that can solve for all of the specific challenges within each sector of the economy. And so we really scrambled, and by we, I mean, there were a lot of organizations working on this together collectively to try to compile a list of ideas to be ready to move on.

But the truth is that there's so much more work left to do on that, so much more good research work to do to really back up those ideas with support about what are the economic impacts of those policies? What are the emissions reduction impacts of those policies? So we got off to a good start. We have a framework of policy designs to build from, but there's so much more work that is needed to back that up and iterate on that, and work with members of Congress, find champions, get them to think about the politics of those ideas, which are essential to getting them done. So that usually takes years. That is the normal timeframe that we've been accustomed to get these things done. And unfortunately, we now have the benefit of that timeframe to work on these.

Leah Stokes:

We now have years. And we need plans to decarbonize the industrial sector, the building sector. We need to figure out how to decarbonize our schools, something we didn't do at all yet, and now we've got the luxury of time to do it. So as hard as these next four years are going to be, the other thing that I think we have to really focus on is strengthening the climate movement. And one thing I think a lot of

people are talking about in the wake of this election is how we treat each other as people, even people we disagree with. The stories that you open with your friends who went from being Democrats to Republicans. Is the left or progressive movements, are we focusing on shaming people for what they do? Or are we trying to build and bring people in?

And I watched AOC, representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez do a live last night where she talked a lot about this, that if we're not building the climate movement, if we're not bringing more people in, then we're not winning. And so we have to take this time to rethink what we have been up to and how we can bring more people to our movement. And the good news is it's a pretty popular movement. 75% of people are with us.

And I just want to also remind people that a lot of people, millions of people voted for climate progress. They voted for a woman to be president. You can't just say because three out of a hundred people changed their mind, that's the swing that we're talking about, as Chris Hayes has talked about, that everything is lost and you're living in a terrible country where no one agrees with you. Even some of those people who voted on the other side, these are not bad people. And we have to think about how they've been left behind and how we bring them back into our coalitions because we have to win if we want to deliver on climate.

And so hopefully that's a hopeful place to end this. There's lots of work to do between now and 2029, and at least I am pretty committed to doing that work. How about you, Adrian?

Adrian Deveny:

As I said before, signing up to work on climate is a lifelong endeavor, and it can be depressing at times, but I try to remain optimistic because I have two little kids and I'm in this fight for them. I'm in this fight for all of you. And I think that's how most of us who are drawn to this specific issue view it. It is an issue where we know how much is at stake, but we know we're doing it because we're fighting for each other really. It's not just about us. And so that's what keeps me motivated to keep at it.

Leah Stokes:

Thank you so much for coming. We are going to put this episode up on our podcast, A Matter of Degrees, so if you want to share it with other people in your lives, it'll hopefully be out in about a week. And I hope this has given you some sense of purpose and momentum and optimism and everything that you do in the next four years will really matter. And so thank you so much for coming today.

A Matter of Degrees is co-hosted by me, Dr. Leah Stokes.

Katharine Wilkinson:

And me, Dr. Katharine Wilkinson.

Leah Stokes:

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Katharine Wilkinson:

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Leah Stokes:

And if you're digging the show, please hop on Apple Podcasts or Spotify and give us a five star rating, or leave us a review.

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Katharine Wilkinson:

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Leah Stokes:

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Katharine Wilkinson:

And stay tuned for more stories for the climate curious.