

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Fossil Free Media; and Data for Progress

MEMO: Cheap, Clean and Fair: The Winning Climate Message for 2026

DATE: November 20, 2025

Don't Run From Climate — Translate It

Clean, Cheap, and Fair Is the Winning Climate Message for 2026

The Problem With the Current Discourse

The argument goes: Democrats need to scale back their ambitions on climate change, a niche social issue bearing little relevance to voters' daily lives, and instead focus on bread-and-butter issues like the economy.

The problem with the argument: Climate is actually a winning issue for Democrats that provides both an explanation for and an answer to the affordability crisis, which is top of mind for so many voters.

Take electricity prices: Democrats can clearly blame fossil fuel CEOs and Donald Trump's attacks on clean energy for rising prices, while positioning their support for clean energy as a solution. Or look at the growing political salience of skyrocketing home insurance premiums: Climate change is driving this crisis, and Trump's cuts to resiliency programs and emergency services will only make it worse. Finally, just look outside the window: Nearly every American has now lived through a heat wave, flood, hurricane, or other extreme weather event. Democrats can easily portray Republicans as so in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry that they won't admit what's before their very eyes.

The key for Democrats is to stop thinking of climate change as an isolated issue, but rather a powerful narrative to explain 1) why so many costs are going up, and 2) how the switch from fossil fuels to clean energy — something Trump and MAGA Republicans oppose at every turn — is a common-sense solution to bring those costs down. This is especially strong territory for Democrats due to the significant trust advantage they hold over Republicans as champions of clean power. People know Republicans are in the pocket of Big Oil, one of the least popular entities in American politics, but they need to hear Democrats talking about it.

So, here's our thesis: Telling Democrats to sideline climate doesn't make them more electable; it asks them to abandon an issue on which they are trusted. Instead, if framed correctly, climate action can offer credible solutions to lower costs for working families. Climate is not a niche social issue; its effects are coming up daily at kitchen tables, and Democratic responses can draw a [bright contrast](#) with the Trump-era corporate corruption, fossil fuel favoritism, and rate hikes. In short, we believe Democrats shouldn't run from climate — they should translate its impacts, and their proposed solutions, for voters.

What 2025's Results Actually Show

The 2025 elections were a blue wave, and across states and cities, the one thing that mattered most to voters was rising costs. Democrats who confronted high energy bills, named the corporate actors driving them, and offered clear, credible solutions that centered investments in clean energy and utility company accountability [won decisively](#).

- **New Jersey:** Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill ran squarely on energy affordability, promising to freeze rates, rapidly build out cheap renewables and nuclear, and crack down on monopoly utilities, turning a kitchen table issue — rising utility bills — into a winning, populist climate message.
- **Virginia:** Abigail Spanberger's "[Affordable Virginia](#)" campaign linked rising energy bills to unchecked data center growth and aging grid infrastructure, arguing that expanding wind, solar, and other forms of clean energy was the fastest way to keep lights on and costs down.
- **Georgia PSC:** After six straight rate hikes tied to fossil and nuclear projects, Democratic challengers won two Public Service Commission seats by telling voters exactly who profits from high bills and how renewables can deliver cheaper, more reliable power.
- **New York City:** Zohran Mamdani's mayoral bid centered on everyday affordability, which included fast and free buses and cooler schoolyards — elements of a climate-friendly, quality-of-life agenda that voters recognized as both practical and fair.

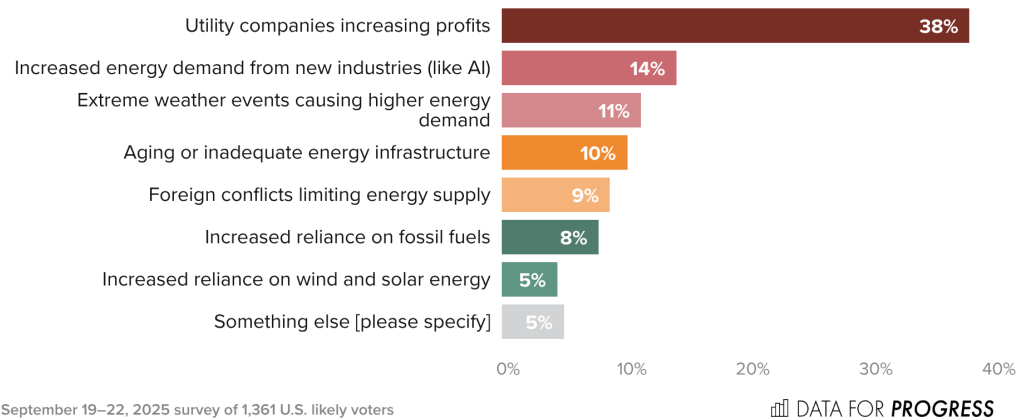
What Voters Believe (and How to Meet Them Where They Are)

Before we argue tactics, it's worth stating what voters already know. They [know](#) their bills are higher than last year. They know monopoly utilities and fossil fuel companies aren't shy about passing costs along. They are concerned that climate change will have a financial impact on them. And they increasingly see cheap, clean power that's fast to build as the practical way to get prices under control and keep them there. When we discuss climate in terms of costs, fairness, and reliability, people recognize we're talking about issues relevant to their lives and are more likely to embrace our solutions.

Voters who've faced these costs are ready for solutions that will hold those most responsible accountable for their actions. Data for Progress [finds](#) that a strong majority of voters (62%) report that their utility bills are up year-over-year. Fewer voters (5%) blame renewables for these bill increases than any other potential cause tested; far more (38%) blame utility companies' profits, growing demand from data centers (14%), grid pressures from extreme weather (11%), and an aging grid (10%), among other issues.

Voters Most Blame Utility Companies for Higher Electric Utility Bills

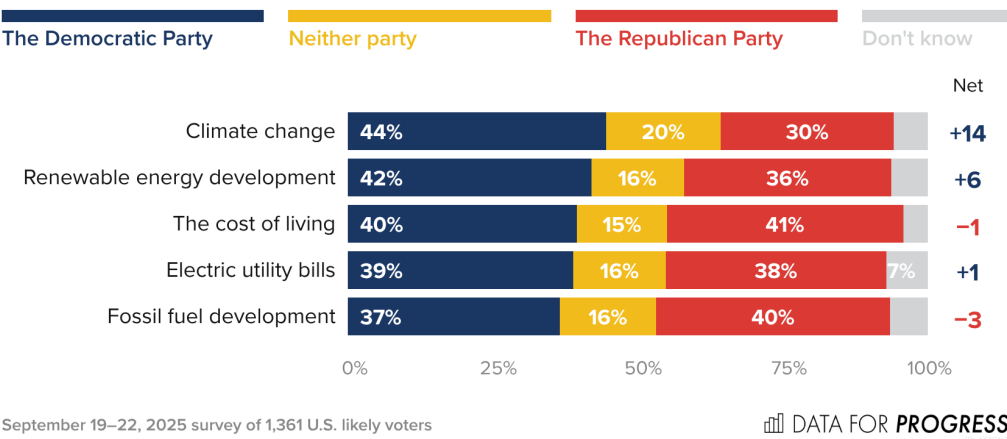
Who or what do you think is most responsible for higher electric utility bills?



Furthermore, neither party currently has a significant trust advantage on “electric utility bills” (D+1) or “the cost of living” (R+1); however, Democrats have a +14-point trust advantage on “climate change” and a +6-point advantage on “renewable energy development.” By leveraging their trust advantage on those issues, Democrats can articulate how their plans to expand clean energy and hold corporations accountable will deliver real cost relief. In doing so, they can win voter trust on the cost of living.

Voters Trust the Democratic Party More to Handle Issues Like Climate Change and Renewable Energy Development

Which party do you trust more to handle the following issues?



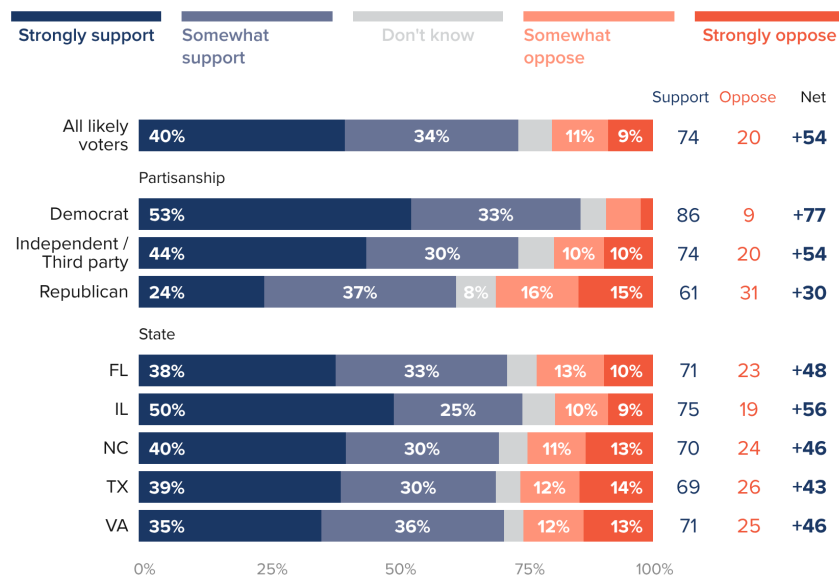
In other words: Don't run from climate — translate it. Voters reward candidates who:

1. Explain why bills are rising and who's to blame (profit-motivated utilities, fossil fuel volatility, [data center demand](#), disaster costs);
2. Aim to implement visible cost relief (rate freezes/credits, [LIHEAP](#) backstops, efficiency/weatherization); and
3. Name who must pay (polluters and profiteers, not families).

Voters already support solutions that promise to tackle these three priorities: For example, climate superfund legislation, including bills passed in Vermont and New York, receives [wide support](#) from across the electorate because it addresses the affordability crisis head on, while holding accountable the corporations most responsible for climate change.

Voters Strongly Support Oil and Gas Companies Paying a Share of Climate Costs

Would you support or oppose requiring oil and gas companies to pay a share of costs for climate-related damages?



August 15–20, 2025 survey of 2,372 U.S. likely voters

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The Frame That Wins: Fight for Lower Costs and a Fairer Economy

Here's the sentence you can say in every district, at every stump speech: *"We'll take on rising electricity bills by building the cheapest power, modernizing the grid, and stopping monopoly price-gouging, all while making polluters pay their fair share so families aren't left footing the bill."*

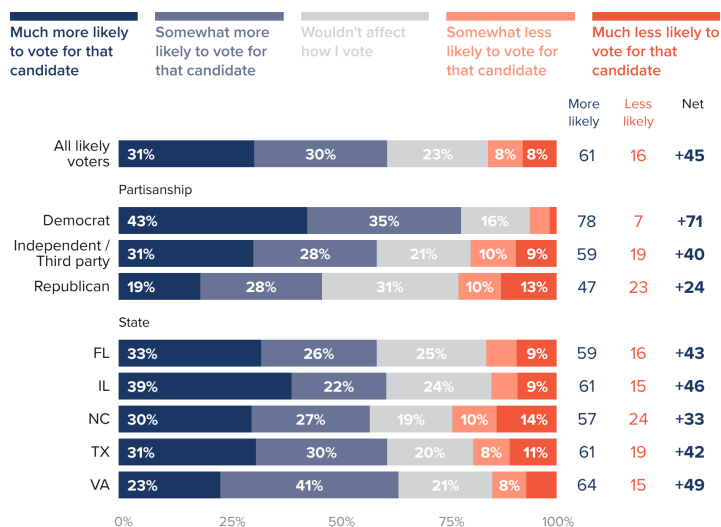
That's a promise to fight for lower costs and a fair economy, all in one breath. The villain is clear without being cartoonish — the concentrated corporate power that drives up costs and stalls

cheaper alternatives. The hero is also clear — a coalition that protects consumers and delivers a sturdier grid by rapidly developing the cheapest energy available.

And there are plenty of concrete, easy-to-understand examples that fit into this frame without getting lost in the policy weeds, including: passing climate superfund laws that shift disaster and grid-repair costs off families and onto major polluters; regulating utilities to block unjustified rate hikes and expose self-dealing; requiring large corporate power users like data centers to pay for the grid strain they create; and accelerating cheaper clean energy projects that stabilize bills long-term. These are all fairness, affordability, and consumer-protection examples that show voters exactly whom Democrats are fighting for, and that voters will support. Indeed, already more than 3 in 5 voters (61%), including a plurality of Republicans (47%), and majorities of Independents (59%) and Democrats (78%), say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who champions a climate superfund bill that would require oil and gas producers pay their fair share of climate costs.

Most Voters Would Be More Likely to Vote for a Candidate Who Supports a "Climate Superfund" Bill

Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who supports a "climate superfund" bill that would require oil and gas companies to pay a share of the cost of climate damages caused by their pollution, or would it not affect how you vote?



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Conclusion

The 2025 election results made one thing clear: Voters support candidates who promise to take on the special interests responsible for the rising costs they are experiencing in their daily lives. While corporate-backed advocacy groups have been arguing that climate is a distraction from this message, it can actually be a crucial mechanism that Democrats can use to address voter priorities head-on. Democrats win when they discuss climate not as an abstract moral cause,

but as a concrete agenda of affordability and fairness. In every race where candidates challenged monopoly utilities, demanded cheaper and cleaner power, and stood up to the industries driving up costs, they won. The lesson isn't complicated — green economic populism works.

Heading into 2026, Democrats have a chance to define themselves as the party that will build the cheapest energy, crack down on profiteering, and make polluters, not families, pay for the climate damage they've caused. Clean energy is no longer a side issue; it's the backbone of economic stability, energy security, and political credibility. Democrats must run on it, govern on it, and deliver it fast.

For questions, contact:

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