

# ACC Action's Climate Policy Agenda

## for the 118th Congress

January 2023 marked the return of divided government in Congress and, with it, the need for bipartisan cooperation to advance our country's shared goals. ACC Action believes that the new balance of power in the 118th Congress presents important opportunities for Republicans and Democrats to collaborate on common-sense and economically smart policies that move the ball forward on climate policy in a significant way.

This document outlines policy opportunities in four broad areas: permitting reform to build new energy projects cleaner and faster, critical minerals to secure U.S. clean energy supply chains, nuclear energy to bolster our energy security, and natural climate solutions to drive low-cost emissions reductions and boost rural economies.

Ultimately, Republicans have an opportunity to lead. Both sides have to come to the table, and now is the time for real action and implementation. ACC Action will advocate for specific policy pathways in each of these areas and activate its grassroots members across the country in support of them.

## 1. Permitting Reform

Both the private sector and Congress have made historic investments in clean energy technologies over the past few years, unleashing billions of dollars to tackle climate change. Now, these technologies must be quickly built and deployed at an enormous scale. Unfortunately, our current permitting process cannot keep pace, adding an average of almost five years in delays and \$5 million in extra costs to important infrastructure projects. Nearly two-thirds of projects currently delayed under this process are clean energy projects, compared to only 19% for fossil fuel projects.<sup>1</sup>

If we want to reduce emissions and bolster our energy future, we have to build. The 118th Congress offers a great opportunity to capitalize on the recent investments in clean energy by cutting red tape and allowing America to build cleaner, faster.

1. Implement a one-year deadline for projects requiring an Environmental Assessment (EA) and two years for projects requiring an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)<sup>2</sup>, as well as an oversight function that kicks in when the permitting process takes longer than the allotted time
2. Establish a 200-page limit for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)<sup>3</sup>

### Cost of NEPA Red Tape

**4.5 YEARS**

Average Review Time

+

**\$5 MILLION**

Average Review Cost

**65%**

Delayed Clean Energy Projects

**ONLY 15%**

Delayed Fossil Fuel Projects

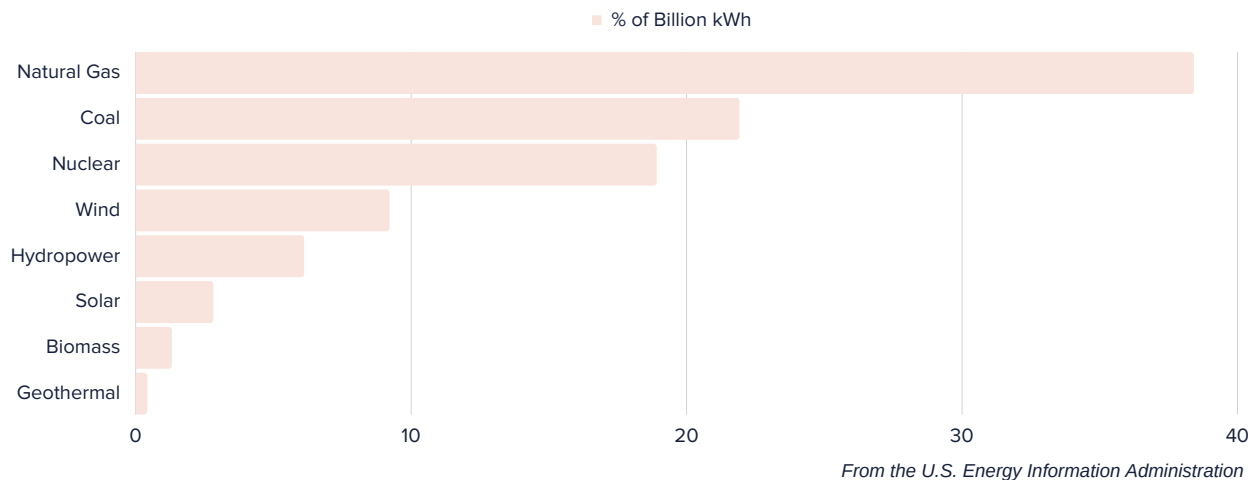
<sup>1</sup>From the R Street Institute. [Link here.](#)

<sup>2</sup>From Senator Joe Manchin's permitting proposal. [Link here.](#)

<sup>3</sup>From Senator Shelley Moore Capito's permitting proposal. [Link here.](#)

3. Shorten the statute of limitations for lawsuits to 60 days<sup>4</sup> for an initial appeal that demonstrates clear error, to which the government would respond within 21 days<sup>5</sup>, as well as restricting lawsuits from groups that didn't provide comment during the public comment period and establishing standing requirements for individuals who submit complaints after the comment period
4. Make categorical exclusions to NEPA more consistent and widespread; establish clear guidelines for this, especially where environmental impacts are well-understood<sup>6</sup>
5. Adequately staff permitting offices
6. Extend FAST-41 to all infrastructure projects under NEPA<sup>7</sup>

## U.S. utility-scale electricity generation by source and share of total in 2021



## 2. Nuclear Energy

Nuclear energy is the largest source of carbon-free electricity in the United States, producing over half of our zero-emissions energy. As we move toward cleaner forms of energy, it is crucial to also ensure the reliability of our electricity grid. Tackling climate change will be impossible without the clean baseload power provided by nuclear energy.

Unfortunately, the world has been heading in the wrong direction for the last few years, shutting down nuclear plants and jeopardizing both our energy security and climate goals in the process. Yet, amid an acute energy crisis, more and more countries are starting to embrace nuclear power again. By leading the world on next-generation nuclear innovation, the United States can both reduce emissions and protect our energy security.

1. Direct the NRC to facilitate the efficient licensing and deployment of advanced nuclear reactors & create a separate regulatory track for advanced nuclear reactors

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> From the R Street Institute. [Link here.](#)

<sup>6</sup> From the Bipartisan Policy Center. [Link here.](#)

<sup>7</sup> From the R Street Institute. [Link here.](#) Also the Bipartisan Policy Center. [Link here.](#)

2. Direct the NRC to establish a milestone performance-based, rather than a prescriptive, regulatory framework, expedite timelines for approvals, and reform its linear no-threshold model to better reflect the latest scientific understandings of radiation
3. Reform the NRC's fee structure to significantly reduce the costs involved in applying for a license
4. Facilitate international nuclear energy cooperation and investment, by establishing multilateral nuclear financing relationships, creating cohesive civil nuclear export procedures, and securing nuclear regulatory harmonization between the United States and other foreign nations
5. Establish a domestic Uranium and HALEU reserve through the Department of Energy, for civilian nuclear purposes

**80%** of the minerals needed to build our clean energy future come from China

### 3. Critical Minerals

Critical minerals are the building blocks of the clean energy transition. Clean technologies such as wind turbines, solar panels, and electric vehicle batteries all require critical minerals (i.e. cobalt, lithium, etc.) in the manufacturing process. Currently, the United States imports up to 80% of these minerals from China,<sup>8</sup> creating a dangerous reliance on a country that does not share our national interests.

In order to establish a secure critical mineral supply chain that ensures our clean energy future, we must boost domestic production and create stronger trade relationships with our allies.

1. Fast-track more critical mineral mining projects for permitting acceleration under FAST-41
2. Direct the Department of Defense to build up a stockpile of critical minerals and rare earth elements at the National Defense Stockpile (NDS), in order to last at least one year in the event of a supply disruption, as well as empower the NDS manager to continuously update the list of strategic and critical minerals that are fundamental to the energy transition, and make purchases relevant to that
3. Direct the State Department to expand the Mineral Security Partnership to include India, Chile, Indonesia, and South Africa, which are all major producers and potential processors of critical minerals<sup>9</sup>
4. Enable and empower the clean-up of abandoned hardrock mines, by providing liability protections to states, non-profit organizations, and other entities engaged in these clean-up projects, as well as ensuring their swift permitting approval

<sup>8</sup> From the U.S. Geological Survey. [Link here.](#)

<sup>9</sup> Currently the MSP excludes these countries. [More info here.](#)



Natural climate solutions can achieve over 1/3rd of our worldwide emissions reduction goal by 2030.

## 4. Natural Climate Solutions

Nature is one of our best allies in the fight against climate change. From making communities more resilient to sequestering carbon dioxide, ecosystems such as forests, grasslands, and mangrove forests are critically important. According to the National Academies of Sciences, natural climate solutions can provide up to 37% of the worldwide emissions reductions necessary by 2030.<sup>10</sup>

Policies and programs like voluntary carbon markets, planting trees, and supporting regenerative agriculture are some of the most cost-effective and popular ways to fight climate change, attracting broad bipartisan support. Crucially, natural climate solutions policies also spur investment in rural communities that are often left behind in climate conversations. At a moment of historic partisan division, Americans can unite behind natural climate solutions with 90%<sup>11</sup> of Americans in favor of planting a trillion trees to sequester carbon.

1. Establish a framework to accelerate global carbon markets and provide technical assistance to allies and landowners in developing countries, to reduce deforestation and protect valuable ecosystems
2. Make the 45Q tax credit tech-neutral to accommodate biochar and other nature-based opportunities for carbon sequestration
3. Establish a blue carbon registry to research and catalog the full potential of carbon sequestration in marine ecosystems, as well as identify best opportunities for additional funding
4. Request that the Administration designs an all-of-government strategy to wildfire resilience, by prioritizing, streamlining, and expanding interagency spending on effective wildfire management practices that ensure healthy and resilient forests and grasslands
5. Promote the planting, growing, and restoring of more trees in the U.S. and around the world.
6. Encourage the development and use of innovative wood products and promote smart forest management practices for the sustainable harvesting of timber on federal lands
7. Empower America's farmers to incorporate conservation and climate co-benefits in their agricultural practices, by reducing the regulatory barriers facing domestic agricultural production, as well as expanding access to technological innovations such as precision agriculture and biotechnology, as part of the 2023 Farm Bill

<sup>10</sup>From the Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences. [Link here.](#)

<sup>11</sup>From The Nature Conservancy. [Link here.](#)