

The Washington Post

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The Energy 202



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Here how Democrats plan to pressure Trump on energy and environmental policy this fall



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THE LIGHTBULB



House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

There are only a few months before the 2020 election dominates the political conversation in Washington — and reduces the chance of Congress passing real energy and environmental legislation. As Congress returns from recess this week, here's how Democrats plan to keep up the pressure on President Trump and Republicans -- and lay the groundwork for potential action if one of their candidates does make it to the Oval Office.

1. Pushing forward bills that challenge Trump's priorities — and demonstrate their environmental bona fides to voters. House

Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) [said](#) last week the chamber would take up three bills this week that would block oil and natural gas drilling in the Atlantic, Pacific, eastern Gulf of Mexico and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. “These bills will help protect our environment and the economies of coastal communities that rely on tourism, outdoor recreation, and fishing,” Hoyer wrote.

But the bills have little chance of passing the Senate — and essentially no chance of being signed by Trump, whose administration has sought to lease within the Arctic refuge and along more of the U.S. outer continental shelf. But by bringing the bills to the floor, Democrats are forcing coastal Republicans in states like Florida and South Carolina to take tough votes ahead of the 2020 election. This is a familiar strategy for Democrats since taking control of the House: [The bill](#) that would have forced the United States to remain in the Paris climate agreement was another one that was passed and promptly sent to certain death in Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's (R-Ky.) Senate.

House Democrats will also continue with their raft of oversight inquiries into the Trump administration's environmental policies. The Natural Resources panel, for example, will hold hearings this month on the controversial relocation of the Bureau of Land Management's headquarters to Colorado. Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) will also travel to Puerto Rico to assess the island's slow recovery from Hurricane Maria under Trump.

2. Outlining long-term policy priorities for a potential future

Democratic president: Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce Committee hope to introduce by the end of the year a bill that aims to eliminate the nation's contributions to climate change by the middle of the century. The legislation parallels plans put forward by most

Democrats seeking the party's nomination to achieve net-zero climate-warming emissions by at least 2050.

Taken together, they represent the new benchmarks for the Democratic Party. And while such a bill stands no chance of becoming law this Congress, it can impact the policy discussion — on the campaign trail and beyond.

Many of the 2020 Democratic candidates are setting their deadlines for decarbonization sooner. But ultimately, if elected, anything they want to pass will have to go through Congress. “It’s a rather aggressive approach. Is 2050 ambitious? Absolutely,” Rep. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), chair of the Energy and Commerce subcommittee on climate change and the environment, [told](#) reporters in July.



A label states that these pans do not contain PFAS. (AP Photo/Ellen Knickmeyer)

3. Getting some bipartisan bills into Trump's hands: Fresh off the heels of [passing](#) into law the most sweeping conservation legislation in a decade, Democrats and Republicans are in the mood to put together a few other pieces of legislation that can actually make it to Trump's desk.

One key priority for both parties is reducing the prevalence of a class of chemicals known as polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl substance, or PFAS. The pollution issue cuts across party lines because the compounds — long used in water-repellent fabrics, nonstick cookware and firefighting foams — have been found in

numerous towns and military bases nationwide. The chemicals have been linked to thyroid disease, weakened immunity and certain cancers. Members of both parties have introduced dozens of standalone bills — many of them bipartisan — addressing the "forever chemicals," called so because they do not break down naturally.

In May, the Energy and Commerce panel held a legislative hearing on 13 of those bills. Now the committee, led by Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-N.J.), hopes to put together a comprehensive package, though committee spokeswoman Elysa Montfort said the panel has not settled on when to introduce it.

Another issue both parties hope to tackle is, surprisingly, climate change — at least when it comes to transportation. In July, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee [unanimously approved](#) the first transportation bill to acknowledge the issue. The legislation would funnel \$10 billion to reducing emissions and preparing roads, bridges and other infrastructure for extreme weather.

Now John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), the panel's chairman, hopes to have a full Senate vote on the bill before the end of the year. On the other side of the Capitol, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee aims to introduce its own transportation reauthorization bill this year or early next year.

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POWER PLAYS



President Trump and the DHS Secretary hold up a NOAA chart with the projected track of of Hurricane Dorian that appears to have been extended with a black line. (Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)

— **"Perhaps the darkest day ever for leadership"**: The broader community, including former National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and National Weather Service leaders, has spoken out after NOAA sided with Trump over its own scientists in releasing a statement on Friday that Hurricane Dorian had in fact threatened Alabama when Trump tweeted that it would.

What happened? In an unsigned statement, NOAA told the public "that information provided to the president and the public between Aug. 28 and

Sept. 2 ‘demonstrated that tropical-storm-force winds from Hurricane Dorian could impact Alabama,’” The Post’s Jason Samenow, Andrew Freedman and Matthew Cappucci [report](#). NOAA also admonished the National Weather Service office in Birmingham, Ala. for its tweet that contradicted the president’s assertion.



The response: “Many critics say NOAA’s decision to back Trump is putting politics before facts and undermining forecasters’ ability to carry out their mission to protect life and property, while eroding public trust. They also worry about how the statement will affect Weather Service forecasters’ morale,” Samenow and Freedman [write](#). Moreover, the American

Meteorological Society called the censure of the Birmingham forecast “unwarranted.” One of the strongest reactions, The Post team writes, was from former NOAA official David Titley who [tweeted](#) after NOAA’s Friday statement: “Perhaps the darkest day ever for leadership. Don’t know how they will ever look their workforce in the eye again. Moral cowardice.”

NOAA staff warned not to refute Trump: A week before NOAA’s public defense of Trump, a top agency official sent a directive to staff warning against contradicting the president, also telling staff not to “provide any opinion,” The Post’s Freedman, Samenow and Colby Itkowitz [report](#). One NOAA meteorologist told The Post: “This is the first time I’ve felt pressure from above to not say what truly is the forecast... It’s hard for me to wrap my head around.”

(Stan Honda and Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images)



(Stan Honda and Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images)

— **Trump vs. California, cont'd:** Trump's Justice Department has launched an antitrust investigation against four major automakers after they struck a deal with the state of California to maintain higher fuel efficiency standards than those set by the federal government, The Post's [Juliet Eilperin and Steven Mufson report](#). California officials and Democrats chastised the move as a way to politicize the matter and impose Trump's policies.

But the administration is saying: The Environmental Protection Agency and Transportation Department notified the California Air Resources Board

and its chair, Mary Nichols, that the state's agreement with the companies "appears to be inconsistent with federal law." State officials cite their state's rights under the 1970 Clean Air Act.

How California is responding: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said the probe "seeks to weaponize law enforcement for partisan political purposes to advance the Trump administration's toxic special interest agenda." And Nichols herself adds that the Justice Department is trying to "frighten" automakers "out of voluntarily making cleaner, more efficient cars and trucks than EPA wants."

And California Gov. Gavin Newsom also took a jab at the president and the Sharpiegate in responding to the probe:



And finally, Arnold Schwarzenegger, the state's former Republican governor, chastised the Trump administration's move toward revoking California's ability to set its own vehicle emissions standards in an [op-ed in The Post](#). "How many times have you heard conservatives beat the drum of states' rights?" he wrote. "But suddenly, when a state wants to pollute less and protect its citizens from deadly pollution, conservatives throw states' rights straight out the window."

Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.) (Mike Christy/Arizona Daily Star via AP)



Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.). (Mike Christy/Arizona Daily Star via AP)

— **House Natural Resources Dem calls for probe into Interior public records policy:** Committee chairman Grijalva sent a letter to the agency’s Inspector General office to call on an additional investigation into Interior’s Supplemental Awareness Review process, the Hill [reports](#). “The supplemental review is in addition to the Interior’s Awareness Review process first put forth as early as May 2018. That policy allows any presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed, non-career senior executive employees the ability to review FOIA requests related to them before they are released publicly,” per the report. “Critics argue the policies allow

political staff unprecedented input into the legitimacy of FOIA matches and that they could lead to documents being unlawfully withheld.”

— **Trophy hunter can import black rhino remains:** The Trump administration said it will allow a Michigan trophy hunter who paid \$400,000 to hunt and kill a rare black rhinoceros in Africa to import its skin, skull and horns. “Documents show Chris D. Peyerck of Shelby Township, Michigan, applied last year for the permit required by the Fish and Wildlife Service to import animals protected under the Endangered Species Act,” the Associated Press [reports](#). “The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists black rhinos as a critically endangered species, with about 5,500 remaining in the wild. Nearly half of those are in Namibia, which is allowed under international convention to permit five male rhinos a year to be legally killed by hunters.”



THERMOMETER



'This looks like hell': Hurricane Dorian survivors desperate to leave Abaco

— **The latest on Dorian:** Over the course of about two weeks, the storm hit the U.S. Virgin Islands, devastated the northern Bahamas, scraped Florida and coastal Georgia, before blasting the Carolinas, before swirling by eastern New England and then barreling through the Canadian Maritimes. “Friday marked Dorian’s 13th day as a named storm and ninth as a hurricane. Fewer than 10 percent of hurricanes in recorded history have lasted this long,” Samenow and Freedman [write](#). “Dorian will go down in infamy as being the most destructive storm to hit Grand Bahama Island or Great Abaco Island, as well as tying the record for the strongest winds at landfall of any tropical cyclone in the North Atlantic Ocean Basin,” writes

Cappucci, who details a timeline of the storm’s path since it was named on Aug. 24.

“This looks like hell”: In the Bahamas, the government says the death toll following Dorian is officially at 43, but Prime Minister Hubert Minnis said Friday it would “significantly increase.” “The storm was indiscriminate, taking multimillion-dollar homes and tin shacks... Two power stations have been smashed. From the air, the local chicken farm — Abaco Big Bird — is a field of shredded aluminum,” The Post’s Anthony Faiola [writes](#). “...In hard-hit Grand Bahama, the team has had significant challenges in accessing some areas, according to John Michael Clarke, chairman of the Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Committee. He added that an oil spill has made the situation worse, and that the team is working with representatives to protect the water supply and fishing communities.”



DAYBOOK

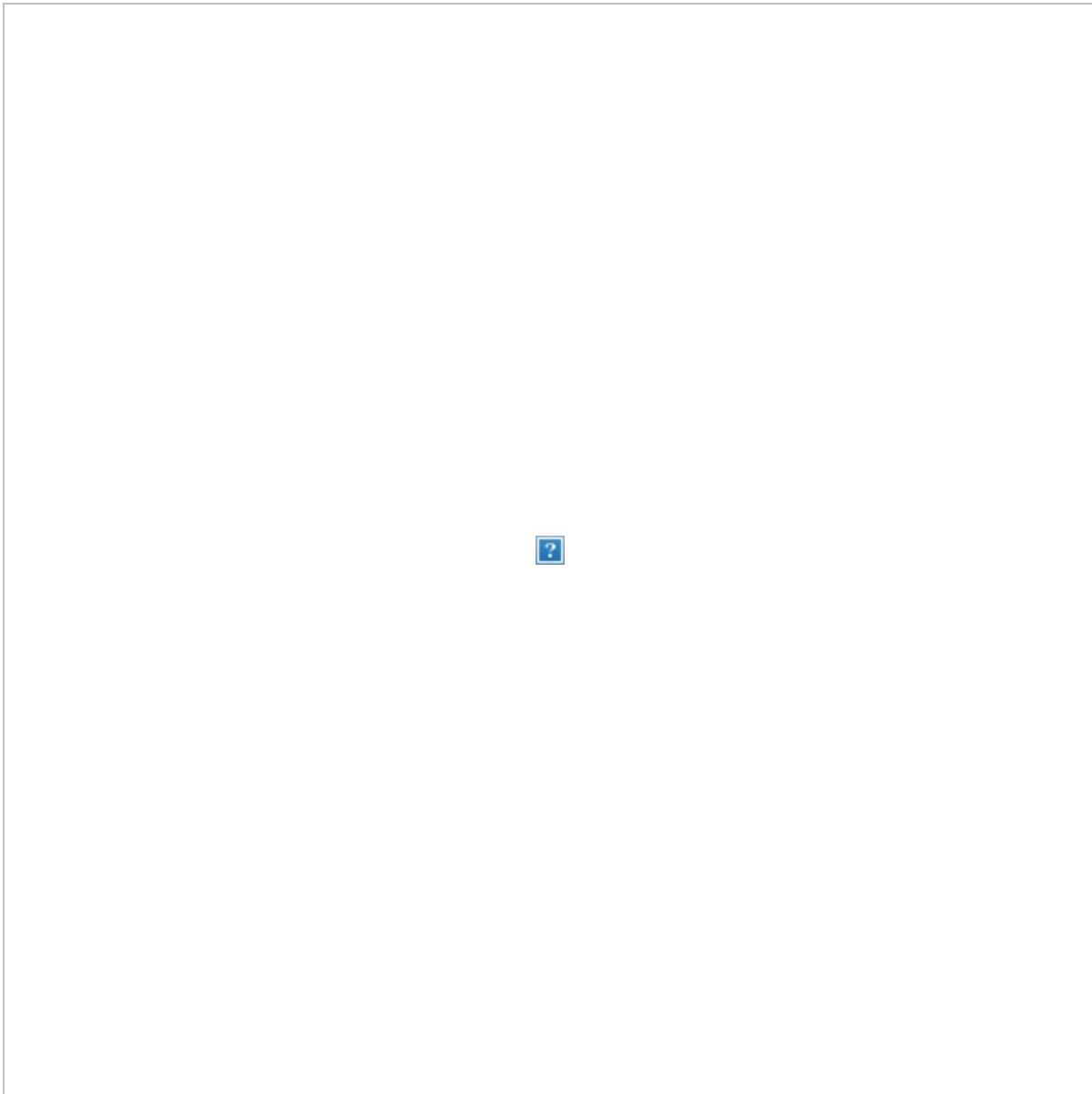
Coming Up

- The House Natural Resources Committee will hold an oversight [hearing](#) on the “Examining the Proposed Reorganization and Relocation of the Bureau of Land Management Headquarters” on Tuesday.
- The House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis holds a [hearing](#) on manufacturing jobs on Tuesday.
- The House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on the Environment hold a hearing on PFAS contamination and corporate accountability

on Tuesday.

- The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee holds a nomination [hearing](#) on Wednesday.
- The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy holds a hearing on various legislation on Wednesday.


EXTRA MILEAGE



The public beach in Dauphin Island on Saturday. (Avi Selk/The Washington Post)

— **“The city stands”**: The Post’s Avi Selk [reports](#) this dispatch from

Mobile, Ala. after Trump warned about Dorian's impact on the state. "The grocery stores are fully stocked, the Home Depot has no lack of generators, tarps and plywood, and it's business as usual at the Waffle Houses," he writes. "Boaters on the Mobile River have been urged to caution — only because a group of manatees were spotted frolicking nearby."

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Democracy Dies in Darkness

