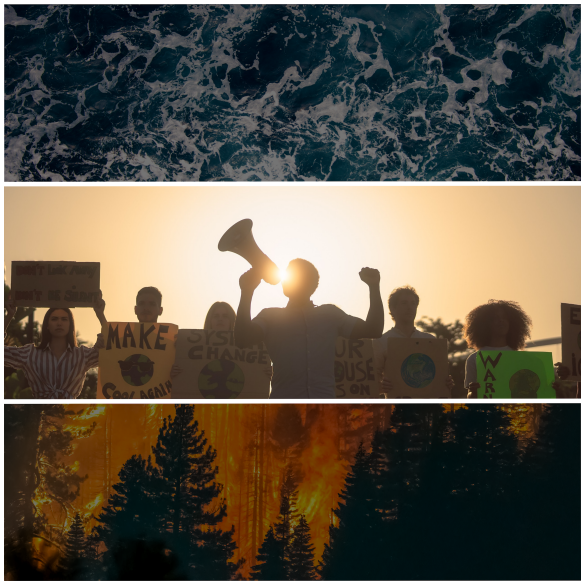
This Year in Climate: 2025

https://www.climateone.org/audio/year-climate-2025
Recorded on December 19, 2025



Note: Transcripts are generated using a combination of automated software and human transcribers and may contain errors. Please check the actual audio before quoting it.

Ariana Brocious: Kousha, are getting in the holiday spirit?

Kousha Navidar: Oh my friend, for me it starts in July. Now we're just dep in it. When I came home from the live event we did for Climate One last week I discovered that my wife had started decorating without me and it was like I walked into a fever dream of FAO Schwartz. There's just a Christmas tree with everything decked out, garland around all of our doors, even the doors themselves have big bows across them. Here's the kicker, neither my wife nor I are Christian but we just love the holiday season and Christmas. I'm super jazzed about celebrating the end of the year. What about you?

I also love the holiday season. I really get into holiday baking, so that's already begun. And it just kind of snuck up on me, I realized the end of the year always feels very fast. So here we are at the end of another year, getting to our wrap up show. So let's do it. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Kousha Navidar: I'm Kousha Navidar.

Ariana Brocious: And this is Climate One.

Ariana Brocious: We've made it through another year, and it's become customary here at Climate One to take a look back on meaningful events and conversations from the last twelve months. There's lots to talk about in 2025, starting with the fact that - once again - it was one of the hottest years on record.

Kousha Navidar: Right. In fact, the top three hottest years on record were… the last three years. We are witnessing the Earth's temperature rising in real time. The 10 warmest years in the historical record have all occurred in the past decade.

Ariana Brocious: And warmer temperatures lead to all kinds of cascading impacts on extreme

weather, human health, agriculture, disease, and more. But don't worry, listeners, this episode won't be all doom and gloom. There is good news, too. So let's start our yearly recap with the big trends of the year. Kousha, what's a trend or topic you felt really stood out this year?

Kousha Navidar: Well, I used to work in tech, I find tech fascinating, and 2025 really has been the year of AI.

[music change]

Kousha Navidar: AI growth has exploded over this past year, and that means a growing number of data centers and HUGE energy demand. So much so that nearly all the new energy demand is from data centers.

Ariana Brocious: Yeeesh. At a time when we need electricity for so many other things like electric cars and heat pumps! So should we advise listeners to use Chat GPT a little less?

Kousha Navidar: Maybe, it's complicated! You know, not all AI is created equal when it comes to energy demand. Predictive AI, which is what some believe can help actually come up with climate solutions, is less energy intensive. Kate Brandt, Chief Sustainability Officer at Google points out how that kind of tech can reduce emissions:

Kate Brandt: Using AI to understand traffic patterns, the grading of roads, and a variety of other factors.That's already enabled our users to avoid 2.9 million metric tons of CO2 E. That's like taking 650,000 vehicles off the road.

Kousha Navidar: But generative AI - from companies like Google and OpenAI - could be an energy hog. That's especially true as more people become power users and use those AI models to complete increasingly complex tasks that require more energy.

Ariana Brocious: And when you consider a lot of the things people use those models for…. I'm not trying to judge but you know what I mean. A lot of dumb videos come to mind. And generative AI also has big water demands.

Kousha Navidar: Right. Large data centers use millions of gallons of water per day for cooling. And people like Irina Raicu, Director of the Internet Ethics Program at Santa Clara University, say there needs to be more oversight and transparency around AI's environmental impact.

Irina Raicu: We should rely on lawmakers to put the brakes on some of these efforts. We should rely on consumers being educated so they can actually make choices about what products they want to use and what they don't. And right now, without more disclosure for the companies, it's hard to make any ethical decisions.

Kousha Navidar: We're seeing a lot of communities around the country push back on welcoming new data centers, so we'll see where this goes. So what about you Ariana? What's your biggest climate takeaway this year?

Ariana Brocious: Well, it's hard to escape the absolute knock-down, drag-out attack the Trump administration has taken to anything related to science, climate, or environmental protections. The administration has rolled back regulations on greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. And dismantled much of the Inflation Reduction Act – defunding tons of programs that would help people transition and adapt to future climate risks.

President Trump: Climate change. It's the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world, in my

opinion. If you don't get away from this green scam, your country is going to fail.

Ariana Brocious: The Trump administration has also eliminated datasets, federal offices, and websites. It’s not an understatement to say he’s led a full-scale attack on science.

Kousha Navidar: Not to mention what his appointees at EPA and Transportation are doing to roll back climate-focused regulations, including dramatically easing fuel economy requirements for cars and axing the endangerment finding.

Ariana Brocious: Right. For those who don't remember, the endangerment finding was a 2009 determination by the US Environmental Protection Agency that spells out that greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare. This finding formed the legal bedrock for regulating climate-disrupting pollution from everything from cars to power plants.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. And the administration's actions have been especially brutal for a lot of the people who work in organizations to advance science. We’ve talked with many of them this year, like Brandon Jones, president of the American Geophysical Union. After the Trump Administration canceled the National Climate Assessment and dismissed its authors, AGU stepped up and created a platform to host climate science.

Brandon Jones: This is the science community coming together to say, we are standing up for science. We understand that changing climate and the impacts of climate is existential to all humans, to the, the whole planet. This is an issue that everyone on the planet is facing. So we wanted to make sure it was going to continue.

Kousha Navidar: So yeah, there’s been some good news too.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah. For example, despite what the Trump administration has done to energy policy, in March, renewables provided more electricity to the grid than fossil fuels.

Kousha Navidar: Ok. That's a big deal.

Ariana Brocious: And globally, renewable energy surpassed coal for the first time ever. And much of that has to do with how much China has ramped up production of renewables.

(music change)

Ariana Brocious: China is producing more solar panels and batteries than ever before, and is dominating in the clean energy race. Here is what climate activist Bill McKibben had to say:

Bill McKibben: This rise in the last 36 months, a pretty untold story of just extraordinary amounts of clean energy surging into the world's energy system. It is centered in China, and the numbers are staggering as of about four years ago. We live on a planet where the cheapest way to produce energy is to point a sheet of glass at the sun, and China has been leading that effort. We know about petro states. China's the world's first electro state.

Kousha Navidar: What really strikes me there is calling China the world's first "electro-state." That could change the whole power structure of the global economy. And maybe offer a path towards decarbonization for developing nations due to the low cost of Chinese renewables.

Ariana Brocious: Right, and despite the large tariffs on Chinese solar panels, even in the U.S., solar continues to be the cheapest way to produce energy. And there were some big policy moves in states and cities. Probably none more talked about than when New York implemented congestion

pricing – the first city in the U.S. to do so.

Kousha Navidar: Hey, that's where I live! Yes, it's been a big deal here, it was debated endlessly, there were several false starts. It was even shelved by Governer Kathy Hochal at one point. But back in January it finally went into effect.

Ariana Brocious: So what's it felt like as a New Yorker? And how successful has it been so far?

Kousha Navidar: Well, vehicles entering the "congestion zone" have decreased around 11% compared to last year. Travel times have improved. Transit ridership has returned to pre-pandemic levels and buses are able to move more quickly on their routes through the zone. It's quieter and safer.

Ariana Brocious: Fewer cars and trucks means lower emissions. And I've heard there are some added benefits, like fewer honking cars!

Kousha Navidar: Exactly. Another goal of congestion pricing is to raise money for public transit. As of August, it had already raised $365 million, and was on track with the projected estimate of around $500 million in its first year. We'll see if that actually translates into service improvements. and there are still questions about the fairness of the program and if there will be long term benefits. But so far, so good.

[Music change]

Ariana Brocious: One move we didn't mention was also one of President Trump's first actions: Withdrawing the US from the Paris agreement...again.

Kousha Navidar: The US has basically removed itself from negotiations around global climate policy. And that really was apparent at COP30, the annual UN climate conference which was held in Belem, Brazil. Our country didn't send ANY official delegates this year. And yet, since the world doesn't actually revolve around the U.S., the conference still went on. So let's talk about what did happen at COP 30.

Ariana Brocious: It was kind of a mixed bag, as most of these international negotiations are. Countries failed to commit to creating a roadmap for how they're going to reduce fossil fuel use. They even failed to use the words "fossil fuels" in the final decision.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah, the way the UN process is set up enables individual countries to block language they don't like. And that language was blocked by – you guessed it – fossil fuel producing nations.

Ariana Brocious: On the other hand, nations did agree to create a new fund for tropical forest preservation, and to triple the amount of money to help poorer countries adapt to climate-driven destruction.

Kousha Navidar: Destruction that's been largely caused by industrial pollution from the richer countries. So that only seems fair.

Ariana Brocious: Right. And this year saw successful climate action play out in other venues as well. In July, the international court of justice delivered a historic ruling in a case brought by the small island of Vanuatu that countries of the world have an obligation to protect the planet. Here's Julia Olson of Our Children's Trust, a nonprofit that has been working on this case and others like it:

Julia Olson: We were elated. It is so exciting and such a vindication of the work that young people have been doing across the world for over a decade and the nation state of Vanuatu brought this to the International Court of Justice. It was really the mobilization of youth, many from island nations, youth of Vanuatu and youth in other countries as well, and a lot of indigenous youth who really pushed the country to bring this to the court since only countries can.

One of my favorite parts of the court's decision is where it says, the environment is the foundation for human life upon which the health and wellbeing of both present and future generations depend. And the court considers that the protection of the environment is a precondition for the enjoyment of human rights.

Ariana Brocious: So we'll have to see what the impact of that ruling is. On a sadder note, I'd like us to take a moment to remember a giant, and a true inspiration for millions, who the world lost this year: Jane Goodall passed away at 91 years old in October. I remember learning about her as a kid, and being in awe of this woman who lived with the chimpanzees. Here is what she said last year about her last journey when she spoke with Climate One in front of a live audience.

Jane Goodall: This woman said something about what was my next adventure? And so I thought, hmm, this was about four years ago. So I thought, what is my next adventure? And I thought for a moment, and I said, dying. And it was kind of deathly hush and then a few titters. And I said, well, you know, when you die, there's either nothing, it's the end or there's something. And things have happened to me in my life that I, I feel there is something, and if there is, I can't think of a greater adventure than dying. So before most anybody in this audience, I'll find out. I'll try and let you know.

Music: In

Kousha Navidar: That was lovely. After the break, we're going to hear about ways to help others and address mental health concerns when fossil fueled disasters hit:

Adrienne Heinz: We introduced a mind-body connection, that was an option for people who weren't ready to talk but who wanted community and saw some benefit to doing something physical. So we trained over 60 yoga teachers in trauma informed yoga and restorative practices that help restore balance to the nervous system and take us from fight or flight to rest and digest.

Kousha Navidar: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Ariana Brocious: Help others find our show by leaving us a review or rating. Thanks for your support!

Music: Out

Kousha Navidar: This is Climate One. I'm Kousha Navidar.

Ariana Brocious: And I'm Ariana Brocious. As the Earth's temperature rises, we're seeing increasing examples of how those changes are affecting other natural systems and often making weather events more severe.

Kousha Navidar: Billions of dollars lost, millions of lives disrupted. And apart from the numbers, **people** all across the country and the world are experiencing climate disruption more and more.

Ariana Brocious: And when disaster strikes, those affected suffer on many levels. Apart from having to deal with all the structural damage to homes, businesses and communities, survivors have to grapple with the emotional pain of loss.

Kousha Navidar: Earlier this year I spoke with Adrienne Heinz, a clinical research psychologist at Stanford University School of Medicine. Much of her work has been with veterans on post-traumatic stress disorder. Then, in 2017, the Tubbs fire tore through her Northern California community – and she found **herself** needing to recover from a traumatic event.

Adrienne Heinz: So often, um, I think about it is similar to grief. Like when someone passes away, there are things you don't want to say, like at least, or everything happens for a reason because that's minimizing and invalidating. And it doesn't allow someone to have their experience. And so what I've been saying to the people in my network, who've been affected, you know, my personal network, but also professional, is I'm so deeply sorry for what has happened. There aren't really words to describe my sorrow and, how much I care and want to support you through this. I don't expect any type of response, but please know I have your back. I'm going to check in on you. I'm going to see if you want a gift card to DoorDash this day. I'm going to send you a bag of clothes that I know are going to fit you because we used to share them in college. I'm going to probably come down and watch your kid for a couple days so that, uh, you know, you can go get a massage or take care of insurance. It's whatever you want to do, but they're going to be with someone who loves them and, and, and knows them. And so the, concrete actionable form of support, cause just saying, Oh, let me know how I can help. You put the onus on the survivor to figure out how the help they need when it's a time of overwhelm.

Kousha Navidar: You know, you and I have talked once before and you mentioned something that has also stuck with me, which was the three H's. Do you remember that?

Adrienne Heinz: Sure do. I use it in my household all the time. So when someone's going through it, when they're, when they're catching feelings and just on, on the struggle bus, which is me oftentimes doing this line of work is, you know, we say, do you want to be helped, hugged or heard? And they're very different types of support, as you can imagine.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah, and you're allowing the other person to tell them what they need versus presupposing, which, uh, was, I think, part of what stuck with me when you first said it. When it comes to surviving a disaster, how are some ways that trauma often shows up for people?

Adrienne Heinz: So oftentimes in the immediate aftermath of a disaster you, uh, see people who are struggling to sleep. Often nightmares are very common, feeling on edge, high levels of irritability, kind of reliving different moments of the experience, depending on how close you were to the impact. There might be an uptick in drinking or using substances to cope, and then strain on relationships. And also for caregivers and parents, there's an extra layer of how do you put on your own oxygen mask, so that you can take care of the people that you love. And just getting some psychoeducation about what to expect after a disaster is really helpful for normalizing, destigmatizing and letting people know, like, here's some guardrails.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. So for you in your head right now, when you're thinking about the L.A. fires, for instance, and you're thinking about blueprints or frameworks or even just lessons you've learned from past experiences with disaster, What are lessons that you think of?

Adrienne Heinz: Well, let me start with my community because I live in it and know it best and can tell you a little bit of our story of how we responded and rose to meet the moment. So in that aftermath of feeling helpless and unsure, but recognizing that mental health professionals do have a

skill set to, uh, support people through climate disasters and also helping like thinking about behavior change with mitigation risk for future disasters. A group of local stakeholders from, you know, hospitals, schools, healthcare foundations, nonprofits. came together and said, Hey, we don't want our legacy to be PTSD and alcoholism, domestic violence, divorce, string relationships, childhood adversity, uh, you know, academic languishing. We want to move the needle towards resilience and recovery, and we have to provide mental health support to do that. This has been a mass traumatization and if you're human, you're, you're going to need even light touches. so light touches is support ranging to, you know, therapy. Uh, there's a whole spectrum of care. And so we got together and held several sessions over, over pizza, uh, after work hours, and we designed the Sonoma Wildfire Mental Health Collaborative. And we rolled out a multi pronged approach to supporting community health because there's no one size fits all, everybody has different needs. So the first was a mental health app called Sonoma Rises and that had a lot of support around coping with grief and loss, irritability, transitions, problem solving, self care, and had special content for teens because teens were disproportionately affected by having their schools damaged and also losing their homes. And we had that in Spanish as well. And then we also train the workforce. How do we get people in our workforce in shape to help folks through this mass traumatization? So we trained therapists and also paraprofessionals like clergy and nurses and teachers and how to deliver skills for psychological recovery, which is an evidence informed protocol for getting people back on their feet in the months to years after disaster. And then finally, we introduced a mind-body connection, that was an option for people who weren't ready to talk but who wanted community and saw some benefit to doing something physical. So we trained over 60 yoga teachers in trauma informed yoga and restorative practices that help restore balance to the nervous system and take us from fight or flight to rest and digest. And that synchronous movement with other people can also be a form of, of healing.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. I'm thinking about the full spectrum of experiences you've had in this, in this realm, this, like, very difficult realm, you've worked for years with veterans. Now working with survivors of disaster, in general for yourself, even, you know, 2017 and, and the megafires since then in your own life, has all of that changed the way you have seen and think about resilience?

Adrienne Heinz: It has. And, and, um, it's restored in me so much hope and energy and faith in our ability to, to rise up from adversity and reclaim some post traumatic growth and wisdom from it, that even through most, the most horrible and devastating of circumstances, we can come together. Um, and emerges stronger, better versions of ourselves and of our communities. I've worked obviously in my home community in the Sonoma County area, but also Lahaina now supporting LA survivors and one resounding theme is that there are emergent leaders who gather influence and use their voices to advocate for the needs of their communities and introduce new ways of being and then preparing for future disasters. So that's an encouraging piece. And, uh, other lessons I've learned, especially from, you know, deploying to Maui and seeing just the aloha spirit, uh, one of community and the thinking about principles of aina, like the, of the land and the reciprocity we have with it and using the land for, for healing and, uh, to bring back community connection. There are lessons we can learn from one another and each disaster, even though they're different, about our shared humanity and what we're capable of doing, in the face of trauma.

Kousha Navidar: Dr. Adrienne Heinz is a clinical research psychologist at Stanford University School of Medicine. Adrienne, thanks so much for hanging out with us.

Adrienne Heinz: Thank you for addressing this important issue, and I'm wishing you strength and hope.

Kousha Navidar: Likewise. Thank you.

Ariana Brocious: Another major concern for people this year has been affordability. Of lots of things: housing, food, and electricity bills!

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. We saw it affect the off-year elections, particularly in some of the wins that were tied to frustrations around higher energy prices. Democrats saw big victories in New York, New Jersey and Virginia, as well as a lot of down-ballot races. In Georgia, two Democrats flipped seats on the state public service commission, which regulates electricity and gas rates.

Ariana Brocious: Those results aren't surprising, when you consider that since 2023, Georgia utilities have raised electricity rates SIX separate times, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Higher bills is one of the things the Inflation Reduction Act was working to address – through a whole raft of consumer incentives for ways to make your home more energy efficient and a suite of grants, loans and programs to boost the renewable energy sector.

Kousha Navidar: But as the Trump administration has been dismantling the IRA, we've seen those programs cut or defunded. And that's also taking jobs away from American workers. I talked about this with Roxanne Brown, Vice President at Large for United Steelworkers.

Kousha Navidar: How have rollbacks to the IRA affected your, your members?

Roxanne Brown: It's not been great. And it's not just the IRA, it's also, the bipartisan infrastructure law, right? Um, for the first time in more than five decades, we actually had a set of industrial policies that were linked to the Inflation Reduction Act, to the bipartisan infrastructure law, to the Chips and Science Act. Right. You had these three and you know, for policy people, right. Just, just one of those things is life changing, right? but the fact that we had three really robust, well-funded pieces of policy and embedded within those pieces of policy was industrial policy, really beautifully woven throughout,to create a landscape and a foundation for industry to grow in the United States into the future. Unions like ours, we talk about revitalizing the manufacturing sector. We talk about the hollowing out of manufacturing that has happened over the last four decades. Right. And we talk about what's needed and how we bring our communities back and how we attract investment to communities that have, have lost traditional industry. And it's like the Biden administration heard everything that we had been asking for, and they gave us these three bills and, and now, so much that represented the promise, of those bills is gone. You had, you had cement companies who were waiting for a long time, their r and d arms, had these ideas about, you know, manufacturing, clean cement or cement that had reduced emissions. And here was the bipartisan infrastructure law that provided, through the Department of Energy, a pot of money. To fund the development of those projects and they move forward with them. And then earlier this year, there's an announcement from the Trump administration that they were gonna scale back $3 billion worth of investment for any clean energy development project. And there were about 24 projects, and the bulk of those were at industrial facilities. And so the, the promise of bringing industry and innovation into the future gone just like that. And then the ability of these companies to move into the future in a way that is innovative, that is competitive in the global marketplace, is now a question mark. You know, I keep saying this internally, but it's, why would we go from a posture as a nation of saying the United States is open for business. You come here, you make investments in these technologies, in these sectors that are growing, and we will support you in that. We have the set of resources to support your investment, and you have. All these companies coming and saying, oh my God, the United States is open for business. And then all of that was ripped from these companies and, and the jobs associated. And now we have a closed for business sign.

Kousha Navidar: You know, so much of your job from our conversation to me, I, I hear the importance of messaging, the vision, and. It, it's not lost on me that USW didn't have to enter the climate space. You, you chose to, but now you have to sell it to your membership or you have had,

this is not a new thing. You have had to sell it to your membership. Kind of like how politicians have to sell ideas to their constituents.

Roxanne Brown: Right.

Kousha Navidar: So how do you go about doing that?

Roxanne Brown: Um, I really appreciate that question. Um, I, I really, I really do Kousha, because it's. It's layered. There's so many pieces to it. And I would say the, the first piece of it is, um, service is a word that we use in, in the labor movement. And so for, for labor unions, our job is to service our members and servicing our members takes a whole bunch of different fronts. And one of those is long-term strategic planning. It is our responsibility to look across the set of industries and sectors our members work in and strategically plan for the future. And I think back to when I first started working on these issues back in 2005.

Kousha Navidar: Hmm.

Roxanne Brown: So the message that I, and we organizationally used with our members on clean energy and climate policy in 2005, we used the word green, green jobs. You would never find me in 2025 saying the phrase

Kousha Navidar: Oh yeah.

Roxanne Brown: Never. I would never ever, ever, ever use that phrase, because our, our members hear that and they hear, oh, that's not my job.

Kousha Navidar: That's not my job. Yeah. Right,

Roxanne Brown: That's not my job. Right. But today it's clean. And clean just means we're cleaning it up. It's still your job, but we're making it operate more efficiently. We're taking some of the pollutants out of the air. If we could mitigate all the pollutants, that would be great. But it's still, your job just cleaned up. Right? And we've really had to be intentional and smart about updating our language with the time and testing. You know, you, you do, you kind of have to test things but ultimately your members have to see themselves in the thing. In order to get buy-in, they have to see themselves in the thing. So if I say clean steel, right, and I unpack for them what clean steel means, then they're less resistant and they wanna find out where does this clean steel thing go? Right? And

Kousha Navidar: they can see themselves in it.

Roxanne Brown: exactly, they

Kousha Navidar: It sparks curiosity instead of um, uh, alienation, I guess.

Roxanne Brown: Totally. And on the strategic planning front, our members wanna know that we are bought into them.

Kousha Navidar: Hmm.

Roxanne Brown: And we are bought into their future. So much of this is about the future, right? I'm working today. is my job still gonna be here next September? And while you're thinking about that answer is my job, is this facility still gonna be here in 15 years when my kid decides they don't wanna go to college, but they wanna come work where I, so. It's about not just talking to them about the thing and helping them to see the thing and, and making them know that we are bought into

them and we've got their backs. It's about them knowing that we're also bought into the future, their future.

Kousha Navidar: Roxanne Brown is Vice President at Large United Steel Workers. Thanks for having a real conversation with us. I really appreciate it.

Roxanne Brown: Thank you, Kousha. Anytime.

Music: in

Kousha Navidar: Coming up, climate advocate Pattie Gonia uses drag performance to raise awareness and support for environmental and social justice issues.

Pattie Gonia: We can't just throw away half of the environmental community because they might think a little bit differently. And actually how we create the environmental future that we need is building those bridges across difference, is realizing that everyone can make change in unique ways.

Kousha Navidar: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Music: out

Ariana Brocious: This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Kousha Navidar: And I'm Kousha Navidar. This year and last year do have at least one thing in common: Every time I go on the internet, I still feel like I'm bombarded by bad news and sad memes.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, information overload everywhere! Which is why I only get my news via parchment scrolls and owls, a la Harry Potter.

Kousha Navidar: Ok Millennial.

Ariana Brocious: Kousha, you're more of a Millennial than I am.

Kousha Navidar: Damn, you got me. 10 points to Gryffindor.

Ariana Brocious: Ok but back to the deluge of internet noise. There's a lot out there. And a lot of misinformation or disinformation mixed in with good journalism and facts. And it's become clear that one huge area where misinformation plays a powerful role is around climate change. We mentioned the EPA's effort to turn over the endangerment finding earlier in the show. That move was supported by a Department of Energy report that the scientific community widely panned as being FULL of disinformation. Here's Rachel Cleetus of the Union of Concerned Scientists, which filed a lawsuit over the way the report was put together:

Rachel Cleetus: Because it was created by a set of handpicked climate contrarians, it is full of disinformation, cherry picked data, in some cases just outright lies, where the research of several scientists has been deliberately misinterpreted. And it's shocking because, you know, within a day of the report being published, there were scientists looking at their own work where their work had been twisted to say the opposite of what their findings actually were. And it's, it's alarming that this has now got the federal government's backing, you know, the US federal government from the highest levels now is officially adopting climate denial and climate disinformation as its position. That's alarming, not just because of it's about the science, it's about the way it affects people's lives. The disinformation is about how it's impacting people's health, , planetary health, the cost of climate

change. It's essentially trying to downplay the really harmful impacts of climate change, which now are a reality.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. It’s pretty significant when the federal government endorses disinformation. And this actually also came up at this year’s COP, the annual UN climate summate. During the conference, we saw the launch of the Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change, basically, agreeing to fight climate disinformation and promote accurate, evidence-based information. Not all countries endorsed it –

Ariana Brocious: Spoiler alert, The United States, did not –

Kousha Navidar: But it’s a good step. And also just an indicator that this is a serious problem affecting how much progress actually happens on climate change.

Ariana Brocious: For many people, including our next guest, lack of action on climate disruption is inseparable from other structures and policies that cause harm, like attacks on LGBTQ rights and the trans community especially. Pattie Gonia is a drag queen and environmentalist who strongly believes we need to make the climate and environmental spaces more fun. And that joy is an effective means of resistance. Out of drag, Pattie is Wyn. I talked with them about Wyn’s childhood and Pattie’s origin story.

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: I'm so lucky to be from the Midwest. I think it gets written off. I think it gets thrown to the side, but I think the Midwest really taught me that you can't just throw people away, , even when they want to throw away you. I think it taught me to create bridges across difference. I think it taught me a lot that I'm glad I know, and I would have changed the way that I learned it, but I'm glad I learned it. And I think all of this really. deeply applies to my environmental work because I've really learned that we can't just throw away half of the environmental community because they might think a little bit differently. We can't throw away people. And actually how we create the environmental future that we need is building those bridges across difference, is realizing that everyone brings a different a powerful perspective and unique talents and can make change in unique ways. And it might look different than what we think, but Nebraska really taught me that. And so I'm really grateful to be from there. I'm really glad I'm not there now.

Ariana Brocious: I want to figure out if I'm understanding you. Did you feel that you were not welcome in environmental spaces when you were younger? Maybe before you came out, did you feel even when you did come out that that was not a space that you were as welcome?

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: For me, growing up in Nebraska, nature was my first safe space as a queer kid. I knew I was queer at a very young age. I mean, my first memories ever were in a backyard underneath this giant 80 year old oak tree and I think that that does something to you. I think you learn to love nature in a way because it was my playground. It was my imagination. It was I felt accepted. And then, you know, in middle school, high school. doing sports, doing Boy Scouts, so much of the space that I loved outside in nature became a place where I experienced the most homophobia I'd ever experienced before. And it got complicated because when I was also being called, an F slur or being called gay, I was also being told that because I was queer, I was unnatural and I was wrong. And so I really grew to be disconnected from nature. I really grew to love more city spaces and those became my safe spaces. And I think that's part of the narrative writ large in the queer community to run to big cities for that acceptance. But in a way, I feel like I'm so glad that through Pattei, I ran into the forest and really found my people and found myself again and I want that for every queer person. I want that for every person of color. I want that for anyone who maybe didn't get the outdoors as much or didn't get as much access as a kid to really realize that nature and the outdoors are just as much your space as they are anyone else's. And so that's at the core of

my environmental work is getting people outside. I think anyone that works in the outdoor industry or outdoor education is doing some of the most important environmental work out there because we're getting people connected to this thing we're telling people to fight for.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah. How would you explain drag or what a drag queen is to someone who maybe doesn't have a good sense of that?

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: Yeah, I mean, I grew up not understanding anything of what drag was. I wasn't exposed to it, I'd never known a drag queen before, and I think I also had kind of a lot of internalized homophobia of like, well, I'm gay, but I'm not like that. And that's because I was told as a kid, hey, we accept you as gay. But we don't want you to do drag, or paint your nails, or to be trans, or to be friends with any trans people. And I think I learned really early on that conditional love, or love with conditions, is not love. It's a special form of hate. And I'm grateful I know real love now. I truly try to put love at the middle of my environmental action, because I think that's what we need more of as well. But, for me, drag as an art form, that oftentimes queer people, but oftentimes straight people too, do to perform and use gender as the vehicle for that performance. So oftentimes people that are born as male might dress as female. Oftentimes people that are born as female might dress as male. It is not a mockery of, it is a complete reverence of gender and expression and of of performance. It's a playground where anything is possible. It's a playground where I can imagine a newer and better and different world full of love and full of community and full of expression. And for me, why I do drag, personally, is because I wasn't granted that chance as a kid, as a queer kid, to express my femininity. So for me, Pattie and my journey with drag is playing catch up to a lot of the femininity that I wasn't allowed to express.

Ariana Brocious: Hmm. That's really nice to hear. So tell us how Pattie came to be, how you, don't know, what's the appropriate term? How you created Pattie?

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: Yeah, how she, how she was born, how she was born. Um,

Ariana Brocious: Do you refer to her in third person?

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: Sometimes. You know, it's, it's so much me like the, uh, there's not a really a separation anymore, which I'm really grateful for because I think through creating this alter ego or this persona, you get to discover new parts of yourself. And I think that's also a really misunderstood part of drag is oftentimes people think, you know, that drag queens or drag performers are hiding who they are. But it's like, the one time I can't hide is when I look like this. So, for me, it's been a way to, to figure out, uh, pieces of who I actually am and my truth, and reveal my truth. But, Yeah, Pattie was born in a very unconventional way. Most drag performers are, you know, born in nightclubs or are born on a theater stage. But for me, I was born in the middle of the Never Summer mountain range in Colorado on a backpacking trip, and The little backstory to that and kind of why that even happened is because at the time in my 20s, this was like in 2018, I was a photographer and I'd gone to this photography conference to teach at it and there was a dance party at the end of it. And the invitation for this dance party was to go as whatever you wanted to go as for a night. And I'd never done drag, I'd never even dipped my toes into that world. So I literally went into West Hollywood in California and bought this pair of heels and put together a drag outfit and went out that night as a gingersnap, photography pun included and I went out that night and it was so powerful and honestly scary to me t o look in the mirror and see so much of the femininity that I had left out of my life, looking right back at me. And I went out that night and I felt so free, and it felt so fun, and it felt so, like, lighthearted at the same time. And what I wasn't thinking about at the time was that there were hundreds of photographers there, all taking photos, and that photos would eventually make their way back to Nebraska. And to people in my hometown, and people in my church at the time, and to my family. And when photos eventually did make their way back, after

feeling such immense freedom, I was met with complete radio silence from so many people that I thought were my friends or my family. And it was a really hard summer because I was questioning why are all these people that loved me and accepted me suddenly so silent in my life because I had made them uncomfortable. And what I know now that I didn't know then is that, again, love with conditions is not love, it's a special form of hate. But also, that when they were saying, how could you ever do this? Why would you ever do this? What they actually were saying to me is, how dare you show me what freedom looks like? How dare you show me what expression and self love could look like? And they were really afraid of it. And so at the end of that summer, I went on a backpacking trip with a few of the only friends that I really felt like I had in my corner at that time. And I was packing for this backpacking trip. I was looking into my closet at my backpacking backpack and saw these high heel boots that I had shoved so deep in the closet because I was like, I'm never going to do this again. It's too painful. It's too hard. And I just said, what if, and I packed them in my backpack and, at the crest of the trail, right where we went over the Continental Divide, I decided to whip these boots out. It was like a ridiculous five pounds of extra weight in my pack I did not need, but I put them on and strutted the trails for the first time as Pattie. And as the kids do these days, like took some photos, took some videos. You know, came back from the backpacking trip, said a video to a Fergie song, posted it online to this joke Instagram account, and was like, we'll see what happens. And, you know, woke up the next day to millions of views on this video. And I think the thing that still surprises me to this day, though, wasn't just the views, but was the messages I got from queer people in the science fields and research fields and. National Park Service messaging me saying, Hey, you know, we've never done a pride in our national park. Would you come and, and help do that? And now six years later, we're throwing Prides in national parks and in small outdoor towns and headlining Denver pride and making pride for people who would have never had it before. And like, that is, everything I could want and more. And I think that's what we really need in the environmental space is joy, is celebration. I think we forget that. And I think we really, really, really need to look at why more people aren't joining the environmental movement. And I think a truth that we're not ready to swallow as an environmental community is that our spaces are just as gatekept and are just as hard to enter and inaccessible and like serious and it's keeping people out. It's not inviting people in and it's oftentimes spaces just for the ultra wealthy or ultra privileged and I hate that. I want an environmental movement that looks radically different than the one that does now because when I go to climate week in New York City, it is not what climate action really looks like in my life. It is not what I see out there, people at the grassroots level. And I think we need to celebrate that more and celebrate the people that are making changes like that.

Ariana Brocious: So help us make that connection more clearly. Cause I think you really embody these multiple passions. and causes or, you know, things that you're, that you want to work toward. And the environmentalism, and especially the climate aspect is a really strong part of your work. How do you connect, you know, the world of LGBTQAI plus all of that, and you know, that kind of activism with environmental activism, with social justice, with climate activism?

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: You know, I think at the end of the day, we have so many people who have so many incredible skills in the social justice movement, whether that's fighting for their human rights like we did in the civil rights movement with BIPOC people, whether that's the queer rights movement and fighting for the ability to even be seen and recognized or the ability to marry. We have amazing social justice tactics there. Why are we not applying that to the environmental justice field? Why is the environmental justice community not advocating for social justice issues more? I think we forget in a very colonized world that we are not apart from nature. We are a part of nature.

That's why I think that every single environmentalist should be passionate about Palestine and Gaza and everything happening in every war because the U. S. military industrial complex is the world's

biggest polluter. By far. Because if we're not fighting for people on this planet who are a part of nature, what are we even doing? So I don't think it's separate. It's not separate in my head. Like, the environmental movement is the social justice movement and vice versa. There's not a separation. And I think I understand the need to create these different communities. And I love that these spaces exist, but there's not a separation in my mind. We are nature and we are a part of it. It's time to step up to the plate for people and planet.

Ariana Brocious: What you're saying resonates a lot with, a woman we interviewed, Leah Thomas, who wrote a book, Intersectional Environmentalist. and she says very similar things about the fact that you don't leave parts of your identity behind, and that when she was asking her non Black friends to participate in the Black Lives Matter movement, they were kind of like, well, I'm a climate activist. That's not my issue. And she was saying, Well, why not? It's everybody's issue. Um, so I understand what you're saying. And one thing I think that's really a strength of your persona of Pattie of of the way you present yourself publicly is this blend of very heartfelt, serious, content on things like your Instagram feed, let's say mixed with really fun, really joyous, really colorful posts about like drag queens skiing. you know, and then you have things that that really hit heavier. So is that intentional? Is that, you know, a way to kind of tie together some of these different groups of people?

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: Yeah. I want people to know that I am just as depressed as they are sometimes, I feel just as hopeless as they do sometimes. But what I'm so grateful that drag has taught me, that I think every person who wants to fight for this planet or the people on it, could take away from drag is that drag shows me that joy is strategic. Joy creates momentum. Joy has a purpose. It is that strategy, that special ingredient, because the people in power, the people who want you to believe that you can't make a difference in this world, want you to feel apathetic. They want you to feel completely paralyzed, like you can't do anything. They want you to forget your power. And I think that joy and celebration reminds us that there are so many people doing such incredible things. The good news does not get as much attention as the bad news. But there are things happening, and joy is that strategy, joy is that superpower. And that's not saying ignore the issues that are happening, it's saying we can focus on the issues, or we can also stay focused on the solutions. And what I love most that drag has taught me, is that you can take fighting for something seriously without taking yourself too seriously. And I've deeply learned the importance of that because when I take something so seriously, that momentum is not there. When I take something too seriously, I oftentimes am not collaborating. When I take myself seriously, like I'm forgetting the why. And the why isn't just to build a future where we decarbonize the planet. I also want to build a world culturally that I want to live on and with. And that's a world that is connected. That's a world that is full of love and joy. So for me, I can't do what I do without joy. And it's not in absence of all the issues, it's because of that. It is a strategy.

Ariana Brocious: Pattie Gonia is a drag queen and environmentalist. Pattie and Wyn, thank you so much for joining us on Climate One.

Pattie Gonia/Wyn: Thank you so much, Ariana.

Kousha Navidar: Ariana, one of Wyn’s lines that really stuck out to me was when they were talking about how joy is strategic. That resonates with me because joy isn't always easy, but I think it is almost always necessary and it takes a lot of work. And I think that's a good reminder of how we move through the world. Alright, before we wrap up this year’s reflections, we want to take a quick moment here to address something that recently came up online.

Ariana Brocious: Some listeners expressed frustration that we recently featured former Senator Joe Manchin on our show. We appreciate hearing your feedback. Manchin is a complicated figure in

climate politics – a pro-coal, former Democrat who obstructed a lot of President Biden's agenda who was ALSO a key architect of the largest climate bill ever passed in U.S. history, the Inflation Reduction Act.

Kousha Navidar: AND At Climate One we believe firmly in opening doors to climate conversations with people from all perspectives. Even when it can sometimes be uncomfortable.

Ariana Brocious: We believe that strengthening climate action requires engaging with people we might disagree with, because climate impacts affect everyone. And we have to work together.

Kousha Navidar: So as we wrap up our look at 2025, Ariana, what are you watching for next year?

Ariana Brocious: Several things. I'm keeping an eye on the prices of renewable energy because I think batteries are expected to get even cheaper. And we've seen so much this year with the deployment of large scale batteries paired with solar and wind. And that's really exciting because it can add a lot of stability to the grid, uh, locally and also extend the duration that we can use that power on the grid. Um, and you know, more broadly, I think it's really just. Paying attention to see in the absence of strong federal policy and encouragement in this space, what happens? Because we saw a lot of positive developments from a climate space following the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act and the other big bills that the Biden administration passed. Now a lot of those have been, you know, kind of defunded, deactivated, but there's still a, a challenge to address and the markets are still working. And so I am really curious to see how much happens just in that vacuum.

That's really interesting and I think what I'm looking for or watching out for is along the local level too. Yeah. We talked about congestion pricing, especially because I live in New York City. We talked about congestion pricing.

Kousha Navidar: I'm interested in seeing the studies that I'm sure gonna come out over the next year, looking at all of the different impacts that congestion pricing has had in New York. I mean, one just recently came out from Cornell saying that yes, in addition to less traffic. Less noise. There was a 22% decline in particulate pollution, which has such a direct impact on human health.So I'm very interested in seeing how that specific policy is evaluated in the coming year.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, and let us know what's on your minds. You can reach us at ariana@climateone.org or kousha@climateone.org, and we'd love to know what your thoughts or predictions are for the coming year.

Music: In

Kousha Navidar: And that's our show. You can find and listen to all our shows in our podcast feed, wherever you listen.

Kousha Navidar: POD version: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. Talking about climate can be hard, and exciting and interesting -- AND it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review. You can do it right now on your device. Or consider joining us on Patreon and supporting the show that way.

Ariana Brocious: Climate One is a production of the Commonwealth Club. Our team includes Greg Dalton, Brad Marshland, Jenny Park, Austin Colón, Megan Biscieglia, Kousha Navidar and Rachael Lacey. Our theme music is by George Young. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Music: Out