With Washington, D.C., following the lead of California and Hawaii toward 100 % renewable energy in the coming decades, environmental advocates in D.C., Maryland and Virginia emphasize the importance of state and local policy to cut greenhouse gases.

According to the League of Conservation Voters of Virginia Deputy Director Lee Francis, focusing on state environmental policy is especially important in the face of “a Trump administration that is working to roll back and reverse tried-and-true environmental policy.”

For example, in the latest General Assembly session, Virginia passed a bi-partisan bill to clean coal ash in the Chesapeake Bay—one of the state’s most fragile resources.

However, the drive toward clean energy often encounters political hurdles. For example, tax credits for the coal industry were passed in Virginia in tandem with Medicaid expansion, a bargaining tool that conservative legislators used to pull votes from Democrats with high percentages of uninsured constituents.

Another environmental legislation priority advocates has been regional climate agreements. Maryland and eight other Mid-Atlantic and Northeast states belong to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative — a cap-and-trade program aimed at curbing state emissions. Both Maryland and Virginia are members of the broader U.S. Climate Alliance—an interstate agreement to uphold the stipulations of the Paris Agreement of 2015, which the Trump administration withdrew from (/news/politics/Trump-Climate-Decision-Puts-US-on-a-Lonely-Path-Analysis-425876243.html). But in 2018 and 2019 Republican legislators in Virginia blocked their state from joining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

In spite of political setbacks, Francis remains optimistic about green initiatives, particularly in light of the state’s coal ash cleanup effort.

“It’s great to be making progress at a time when we’re backsliding a federal level,” Francis said.