

2026 CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR'S RACE ENVIRONMENTAL SCORECARD

APRIL 2026 UPDATE

CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR CANDIDATES ENVIRONMENTAL GRADE

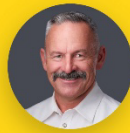


CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY ACTION FUND

KEY ISSUE



Xavier Becerra



Chad Bianco



Steve Hilton



Katie Porter



Tom Steyer

Making
Polluters Pay

D

F

F

A-

A+

Protecting
Community Voices

B

F

F

B

A

Fighting
Monopoly Utilities

C

F

D-

B

A

Defending Lands
and Wildlife

C-

D-

D

B+

B+

Safeguarding
People's Health

B+

F+

F

A-

B+

OVERALL GRADE

C+

F

F+

B+

A

Introduction and Methodology – Updated April 22, 2026

In March the Center for Biological Diversity Action Fund evaluated the five highest-polling candidates for governor of California and gave them an overall environmental grade. On April 13, 2026, Rep. Eric Swalwell ended his campaign.

Based on polling following that announcement, Xavier Becerra moved into the top five tier of candidates. This update adds an evaluation of Becerra to the evaluation of Chad Bianco, Steve Hilton, Katie Porter and Tom Steyer released in March. This scorecard gives each candidate an overall grade and evaluates five critical environmental issues for California voters:

- (1) **Making Polluters Pay:** Whether and to what extent the candidate supports making the fossil fuel industry accountable to the public and pay for the environmental and social damages that fossil fuels have caused;
- (2) **Protecting Community Voices:** Whether and to what extent the candidate is a supporter and defender of the California Environmental Quality Act, supports preserving the voices of communities in government decision making, and opposes the November ballot measure that would weaken CEQA and deregulate industry;
- (3) **Fighting Monopoly Utilities:** Whether and to what extent the candidate is a supporter of addressing the monopolistic utilities in California, whose mismanagement has catastrophically worsened wildfire risk and damage across the state and caused utility rates to soar;
- (4) **Defending Lands and Wildlife:** Whether and to what extent the candidate supports protecting California's state parks, state public lands, and California's wildlife including endangered species;
- (5) **Safeguarding People's Health:** Whether and to what extent the candidate supports efforts to reduce exposure to toxic chemical, pesticides and other pollution in California's air, water and food supply.

Each candidate was assessed using information from campaign websites, their completed questionnaires if returned, news interviews, past political campaigns, and past legislative records when available. Scores were categorized according to the following metrics:

- A-level grades were awarded to candidates who have taken the correct policy positions and clearly included such positions in their campaign platform.
- B-level grades were awarded to candidates who have taken mostly correct policy positions but do not clearly prioritize an issue area as part of their campaign.
- C-level grades were awarded to candidates who have taken partially correct policy positions or taken inconsistent and incorrect policy positions during the campaign.
- D-level grades were awarded to candidates who have taken incorrect policy positions but have not emphasized or raised them in their campaign or have at most one or two positive components to their otherwise problematic position.
- F-level grades were awarded to candidates who have actively adopted the incorrect policy position and are actively making the incorrect policy position a significant portion of their campaign.

Xavier Becerra (Democrat)

Overall Grade: C+

Making Polluters Pay: D

Protecting Community Voices: B

Fighting Monopoly Utilities: C

Defending Lands and Wildlife: C-

Safeguarding People's Health: B+

Xavier Becerra has served in the California State Assembly and the U.S. House of Representatives and as California Attorney General. Becerra also served as the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Biden administration.

Unlike the other Democrats in the race, Becerra has accepted campaign donations from the fossil fuel industry including during his 2018 race for attorney general¹ and more recently accepting the maximum allowable donation (\$39,200) from Chevron for his gubernatorial run.² Becerra has not supported California's Climate Superfund Act, instead asserting that the best way to make polluters pay is to give them a "seat at the table," demonstrating a fundamental misunderstanding of Big Oil's relentless opposition to climate solutions.³ As attorney general, he did not file suit to hold major fossil fuel companies liable for climate deception, though his successor Rob Bonta did.⁴

As attorney general, Becerra enforced the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") and was part of numerous Democratic-led attorneys general lawsuits defending against damaging actions of the first Trump administration. However, during this governor's race Becerra has supported industry efforts to eliminate purported regulatory hurdles to increase housing supply and further undermine the integrity of existing law, raising questions about further erosion of CEQA. Becerra supports limited efforts to address accountability and oversight of electricity utilities, but has not endorsed ending utility monopolies.⁵

Becerra did not lead on public lands protections and wildlife while in Congress, and his campaign website has no mention of wildlife, habitat or public lands.⁶ While in Congress, Becerra voted for legislation that would encourage more floodplain development and lead to the destruction of wetlands, forests and other habitats that help mitigate flood damage.⁷ He also voted against an amendment to the Farm Bill that would have safeguarded an additional 3 million acres of grasslands, which provide habitat for hundreds of species.⁸ Becerra missed key votes to protect wildlife and their habitats, including a vote that would have designated the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as a wilderness to protect it from fossil fuel development.⁹

As attorney general, Becerra joined efforts to require better EPA regulations of dangerous chemicals including perchloroethylene (PERC)¹⁰ and forever chemicals such as PFAS.¹¹ He launched the Environmental Justice Bureau within the Environmental Division at the California Department of Justice, but has not elevated this as an issue for his campaign.¹²

Chad Bianco (Republican)

Overall Grade: F

Making Polluters Pay: F

Protecting Community Voices: F

Fighting Monopoly Utilities: F

Defending Lands and Wildlife: D-

Safeguarding People's Health: F+

Chad Bianco is the twice-elected Republican Riverside County sheriff. During his tenure, Riverside County jails became some of the deadliest jails in the nation.¹³ The pro-Trump sheriff says that if he becomes the next governor, he will “take a nuclear bomb” into the California state government and “absolutely destroy everything that they do to us behind closed doors.”¹⁴

Bianco seeks to end environmental protections that limit new drilling in California, claiming he will make the state “oil independent” if elected by lifting all prohibitions and restrictions on new drilling in the Central Valley and across California.^{15,16} He seeks to eliminate income taxes entirely, with government operations funded instead by a boom in oil production, and has not committed to making polluters pay for the damage they have caused to California.¹⁷

Bianco blames state regulation for driving up costs, promising to eliminate the California Environmental Quality Act and roll back regulatory protections across the board.¹⁸ Bianco also plans to address fuel prices in California by expanding oil production and relying on false solutions such as hydrogen, geothermal, hydro and nuclear power.¹⁹ Among the many regulations that Bianco wants to roll back, he has targeted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and called for expediting water-management projects, putting salmon, steelhead and other endangered species at increased risk.²⁰ He also opposes recovering gray wolves in California and grizzly bear reintroduction.²¹ He also has pledged to weaken safeguards for clean water and clean air from agricultural pollution and pesticides.²²

Steve Hilton (Republican)

Overall Grade: F+

Making Polluters Pay: F

Protecting Community Voices: F

Fighting Monopoly Utilities: D

Defending Lands and Wildlife: D

Safeguarding People's Health: F

Steve Hilton is a former Fox News host and conservative commentator who has touted his personal relationship with the Trump administration. Originally from the United Kingdom, he became a U.S. citizen in 2021 and has never held elected office, though he served in the conservative British government from 2010-2012 and later campaigned for Brexit.²³ Hilton promoted unfounded claims of election fraud after the 2020 presidential election.²⁴

Hilton's campaign seeks to "make California golden again" by gutting environmental protections, expanding oil production, and shrinking state revenues by cutting tax rates, including for the wealthy.²⁵ He favors across-the-board deregulation and has opposed making polluters pay for their environmental harms. He also has pledged to roll back the California Environmental Quality Act if elected governor.²⁶

Hilton claims that California's high utility rates are caused by renewable energy, although he has also signaled his support for rooftop solar, breaking up utility monopolies in favor of locally owned utilities and decentralized energy that put communities back in control.²⁷ Hilton has repeatedly attacked what he labels "the propaganda success of the climate change movement" and has advocated for a "free market" approach that puts a price on natural resources.²⁸

Hilton has promised that he would reverse regulations that restrict water flows for environmental purposes, and expand water-management projects that put endangered species at risk, including salmon, steelhead and the Delta smelt.²⁹ He has called for the elimination of protections against toxic pesticides and agricultural pollution, calling them "environmental regulations that are so extreme" and seeks major rollbacks to longstanding protections for clean water and air.³⁰

Katie Porter (Democrat)

Overall Grade: B+

Making Polluters Pay: A-
Protecting Community Voices: B
Fighting Monopoly Utilities: B
Defending Lands and Wildlife: B+
Safeguarding People's Health: A-

Katie Porter represented California's 45th and later 47th congressional districts from 2019 through 2025. A former law professor and consumer protection attorney, she is known for consumer advocacy, congressional oversight, and corporate accountability.

Porter has taken a firm stance against polluters throughout her political career. She refused campaign donations from fossil fuel interests and served on the House Natural Resources Committee, where she advocated for ratepayers and environmental justice communities.³¹ In Congress, she introduced legislation to eliminate fossil fuel tax breaks, require companies to pay for spill and pollution cleanup, and ensure taxpayers not bear the cost of decommissioning abandoned offshore drilling infrastructure.³² She has also opposed fossil-fuel-friendly permitting reforms, voting against measures that would weaken environmental review for energy projects in ways that benefit fossil fuel corporations.³³ Porter has stated in her environmental questionnaire that she would support holding fossil fuel polluters accountable if she became governor, but has not otherwise taken a clear public position.³⁴

Porter has made few public statements defending the California Environmental Quality Act. She stated in her questionnaire that she supports CEQA generally, but supports limited changes to the law to speed up certain types of development. On utility policy, Porter introduced legislation to combat coordinated utility price hikes but supported efforts to expand utility-owned renewable energy, rather than prioritize distributed energy resources or broader energy democratization.³⁵ Porter has co-sponsored legislation to ban wildlife killing contests, opposed measures threatening biodiversity and habitat protections, and voted against the use of lead ammunition and lead tackle on public lands.³⁶ She has led efforts to better address harmful air pollution and water pollution. She also co-sponsored legislation to ban highly toxic pesticides including paraquat and chlorpyrifos.³⁷ She stated that if she were governor, she would not have signed legislation in 2025 to allow 2,000 new oil wells per year in Kern County.³⁸

Tom Steyer (Democrat)

Overall Grade: A

Making Polluters Pay: A+

Protecting Community Voices: A

Fighting Monopoly Utilities: A

Defending Lands and Wildlife: B+

Safeguarding People's Health: B+

Tom Steyer is a former investment banker turned philanthropist and climate advocate. He founded NextGen Climate and later rebranded it as NextGen America to oppose the environmental attacks waged by President Trump and advance progressive policies and youth voter engagement.

Steyer's stated number one campaign priority is making Big Oil and electric utilities pay their fair share while lowering costs for Californians.³⁹ He has pledged to cut utility rates by 25% and ban corporate PAC money from elections. He also pledged to break up utility monopolies in California and invest in distributed solar, battery storage, and microgrids.⁴⁰ Steyer supports making fossil fuel polluters pay to address the harms of climate pollution in California.⁴¹ He also supports increasing housing density near public transit and walkable communities — helping limit sprawl into wildfire-prone areas — and ensuring data centers do not drive up household energy costs.⁴²

During his 2020 presidential run, Steyer pledged to declare a national climate emergency on day one and use the emergency powers of the presidency to rapidly shift energy systems, accelerate clean energy deployment, and respond to climate threats with the urgency of a national crisis.^{43,44} At his TomKat Ranch, he has promoted a shift away from toxic pesticide use and a transition to non-toxic regenerative agriculture, but he infrequently uses his platform to address corporate polluters dumping chemicals into the air and water.⁴⁵ Steyer's record on wildlife protections is mixed. He has stopped short of fully supporting endangered species protections, incorrectly blaming wildlife protections for hindering renewable energy.⁴⁶

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