

“Every step we take now to clean up our electricity sector will make a world of difference in the decades to come – and we cannot afford to keep kicking the can down the road.”

After the Democratic takeover of the House in 2018, Castor was tapped to lead the newly created House select committee on the climate crisis. Its task was to conduct research and hearings that would educate the public about the threat posed by climate change and pave the way for mitigation legislation.

Last year, the panel’s Democratic members released a sprawling climate plan that aimed to put the nation on the path to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It also aimed to make environmental justice a priority by focusing on the communities that are the most vulnerable to climate change.

A summer of devastating heatwaves, wildfires and hurricanes has made the risk of inaction painfully clear to Americans across the country, Castor said, speaking from Tampa, Florida, where rising sea levels are no longer a threat but a costly reality for many residents.

“When you have farmers whose crops or livestock have been flooded out or dropping from an extreme heat, or wildfires are burning through your town, or your electric grid isn’t resilient and people die in Texas because of a cold snap, that’s a wake-up call,” Castor said. “And I think now people are really looking at policymakers and asking, ‘What are you going to do about it?’”

Republicans remain a chief obstacle to Democrats’ climate goals.

After years of denialism, there is a growing acceptance of climate science among rank-and-file Republicans, particularly those representing frontline districts battered by climate-fueled disasters. And yet, the party remains largely opposed to plans to stop burning fossil fuels, which climate scientists say is the most efficient and effective strategy to guard against an even hotter planet.

Castor said Republicans are missing a once-in-a-generation economic opportunity. Democrats have touted the transition to clean energy as an economic boon, with the president repeatedly promising “jobs, jobs, jobs”.

“As clean energy grows in districts across the country, you’ll see more Republicans finally understanding it creates jobs and is less costly for the folks they represent,” Castor predicted. “That’s kind of the only pathway out of the trap they’ve gotten themselves into – to talk about climate but not do anything about it.”

Democrats face a difficult electoral map in 2022, with their control of both chambers at risk. Many activists and Democratic lawmakers believe they have one, perhaps fleeting, chance to aggressively confront climate change before possibly losing their majorities to Republicans, who are far less likely to act on the crisis.

Castor believes that the Democrats’ spending bill cannot be the last legislative action taken by this Congress. But she is less concerned by the political deadline than the scientific one.

Despite the difficulty of finding a consensus among Democrats on climate legislation, Castor believes there is more Congress can do this term. As an example, she pointed to a funding bill passed by the House that aims to minimize the carbon footprint of the