



Mary Landrieu: Energy Poverty Is a Human Rights Issue, Especially for Women and Girls

By **Staff**

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*This article is adapted from an interview that energy expert Scott Tinker conducted with the Hon. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) at RealClear's 2024 **Energy Future Forum**. Former Senator Landrieu was the chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.*

Scott Tinker

You were in the Senate for 18 years and have been out for 10 or 12 years. What's driving you today?

Mary Landrieu

There is a lot of pressure to find climate and economic solutions. I'm working in the energy space now because I believe the U.S. needs to lead this global effort toward prosperity and abundance. We need a new addition to our energy infrastructure that lifts people out of poverty and does it better than we did in the last 150 years—and we did pretty well.

Our challenge, and I'm speaking for the broader energy sector, is to ask: can we do better? Can we make things cleaner, greener, using less land and materials, and more of our brains and hearts? Can we work together without the mindset that one country wins while the others lose?

Can we grow as human beings and make more people winners? Be less selfish, less greedy, more open and honest? That's our challenge. None of this will be possible, at least from my experience in Washington D.C., without both parties engaged.

Mary Landrieu

I spent 18 years in the Senate, and 16 years in public office before that, as a centrist. That's not an easy place to be—you get shot at from both sides. But I truly believe we need both parties involved. In the last 20 years, we've had the green team on one side, and the red team on the other, and nobody talking. When the U.S. does something great, we usually find a way to do it together.

So, learning the language of both parties is what I'm good at, and I've been doing it for a long time. I thought, why not use whatever skills I have to help? I've never laid pipelines or gone down into a hole, but I'm learning as much as I can.

I'm honored to represent Natural Allies, a coalition led by Alan Armstrong, Toby Rice, and the CEOs of many natural gas companies. We're working to bridge the gap between natural gas and renewables as part of the climate and energy solution. We welcome nuclear, we like hydro, and we want to bring Washington together.

I'm inspired to do this work because I know it needs to be done.

Scott Tinker

Tell us a bit more about what you're trying to accomplish. You've mentioned "we" a lot, which I appreciate—it suggests cooperation across the aisle and globally.

Mary Landrieu

I'm proud to work on two coalitions. First, I'm with Van Ness Feldman, where I focus on energy and the environment. My primary goal has always been to make the world a better place, a value instilled by my family.

I created the Climate Solutions Caucus with Carlos Curbelo and Alex Flint. It's a bipartisan group where members come in pairs—one Democrat, one Republican. We have 64 House members and 14 senators, though we're down to ten because some retired. Chris Coons and Mike Braun lead it in the Senate, and Andrew Garbarino and Chrissy Houlahan lead it in the House. John Curtis, who might be Utah's next senator, was inspired by our work and created the Conservative Climate Caucus, which now has 90 Republicans. It's a beginning.

The second coalition, Natural Allies, is about educating Democrats on the importance of natural gas and renewables. We're talking to labor, the Black Caucus, and Democratic base voters about affordability, fairness, and jobs. We're also working with Republicans and groups like ClearPath. Our goal is to find an economically and practically viable path forward that meets our climate and economic goals. We're making progress, as shown by the last nuclear bill that passed 88-3.

Scott Tinker

I love your description of "two by two."

Mary Landrieu

Yes, a moderate is born!

Scott Tinker

Backing off from that, I want to point out a few examples where I feel we're still struggling. Then maybe you can share some successful ones as well. Those familiar with the political process have seen some grueling, frequent debates around requiring certain actions, as with power lines crossing state lines, which aren't part of the law.

Senator Schumer was proud of pushing through something the Senate couldn't accomplish. New York and California, for instance, are looking to retroactively extract money from oil and gas companies to pay for climate initiatives. We've talked a lot today about the LNG pause. These are the kinds of things where the public looks on and says, "What's happening?" Could you give examples of good bipartisan action? You mentioned the nuclear bill. Talk about that a bit, and maybe other initiatives on the horizon.

Mary Landrieu

Well, the points you raised are valid. I've said, as a leading Democrat, that I think the LNG pause was misguided. I've criticized it publicly. Even the way it was announced was strange—it surprised our allies, posed national security concerns, and unsettled the markets. I hope it's reversed as soon as possible.

A lot of us are working on that, and I hope it happens soon. That's an example of a setback. The FERC ruling is another. You still have states like New York and California not moving in the right direction. The

coastal cities, the blue states like California and New York, are really struggling.

But I see a growing recognition in the heartland, thanks to work happening in states like Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah, and others. There's a growing realization of how important hydrocarbons are. Our challenge is to use them more efficiently and cleanly. This is less prominent in New York or California, but more so in places like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Ohio. This upcoming election will also affect that.

Scott Tinker

Do you think those states will matter in the federal election?

Mary Landrieu

Absolutely. Those states will really matter in a federal election. As for the nuclear bill, that's a good example of bipartisan action. We've also seen progress in agriculture, with bipartisan efforts around carbon sequestration and stewardship of the earth, with support from the evangelical and Catholic communities. This cross-faith, bipartisan collaboration has been an entry point for many members to work together.

The infrastructure bill was also bipartisan. Four presidents had promised it, and finally, there was enough support to pass it. The CHIPS Act is another example—not energy-related, but real bipartisan work. I think we just need to keep pushing, as you're doing with data and facts, keeping our voices calm. Let's stop scaring people and give them hope. I love Scott's term, "an era of abundance." Nobody wants to move into an era of scarcity.

What really worried me was when I went to Europe last year and I was shocked by what I heard. A year and a half ago, their plan for addressing climate sounded to me like, "We're not going to have industry anymore. We're going to turn down our thermostats." We were literally sitting in the dark at these meetings. Have you all been to those meetings?

Scott Tinker

We're often in the dark!

Mary Landrieu

Yes! I was like, "Do y'all have lights here?" They told me, "We keep them low to conserve energy." I thought, "I'm burning up!" The windows were closed, no air conditioning. And coming from Louisiana, I was thinking, "What is going on?" It was hot outside, but we have air conditioning and lights. They don't believe in that. So I wondered, "How can I go home and tell people they can't turn their lights or fans on?" I lost my last election, so it couldn't get much worse, but I couldn't tell people that.

This won't work in America. That was my takeaway from the trip. I'm sorry if any Europeans are here, I don't mean to offend, but America won't tolerate that.

Americans need a proactive way forward, where we can grow and expand. We want what we want when we want it. That's just how Americans are. We want to fly, drive, have speedboats. We also want to help others, especially those in poorer countries, without wasting money. The heart of America is to help others, and we should do that.

I love what Exxon has done in Guyana, and I can't wait to see it myself. The president of Guyana has done more to lift his people out of poverty than any government program, whether early childhood education or anything else. It's about giving people electricity.

Women know this well. In poor countries, women—who have the same intelligence and capacity as men—are treated like donkeys. All they do is haul water and wood. Imagine spending your whole life doing that. It's shameful. Some U.S. policies unintentionally exacerbate this problem. As a feminist and a leader, I'm appalled. Energy poverty is a travesty, especially for women and girls.

I've traveled enough to see what we can do as a country. I've seen the victories we've achieved, and I hope we can legislate in a way that builds a foundation, no matter who's elected president. I don't want to hold my breath every four years. I've seen eight or nine presidents now, and I've known them all since I was a little girl. I just want to see Congress act smartly and build this new world of abundance, year after year.

Scott Tinker

What gives you hope when you look out here today?

Mary Landrieu

We need more courage and honesty on both sides of the aisle. The world has depended on the U.S. for a long time. Not because we're the greatest country ever, but we're pretty darn good. When we set our minds to something, we can accomplish it. I hope we have the courage to continue to lead in the energy space.

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The Honorable **Mary**
L andrieu is a Senior

Landrieu is a Senior Policy Advisor for Van Ness Feldman, LLP. Senator Mary Landrieu served in the United States Senate for three terms, from 1997-2015.



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