OUTLOOK / 4 MIN READ

Building for the Kitchen Table

The builder economy can make a stronger argument by starting with the kitchen table.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01
In a K-shaped economy, households with assets have gained while wage earners face rising costs for groceries, rent, insurance, childcare and electricity.

02
Most voters feel the cost of living far more than geopolitics. Builders make a stronger case when they start at the kitchen table and treat national security as a result of strength at home.

03
Healthcare, education, energy, land and mobility are well placed. Companies there should tell their story in local terms and get ready for public capital before the money arrives.

Pundits say American politics moves like a pendulum. Fans of HBO's dragons might call it a wheel. I think it moves more like a compass needle. From the cockpit or bridge it looks like it's swinging, but it's really lagging, overshooting, and slowly settling toward north. That magnetic north is shifting, pulled by a changing world order abroad and, more powerfully, by a growing sense at home that the economy no longer works for most families.

01 The K-shaped economy

Economists have spent the past few years describing a "K-shaped" economy. Households with assets (homes, equities, retirement accounts) have done well as those assets appreciated. Households that rely mainly on wages have faced higher prices for groceries, rent, insurance, childcare, and electricity, and their incomes haven't kept up. Headline numbers can look healthy while a large share of the country feels the ground shifting under them.

That gap is showing up in the national mood. Many parents no longer expect their children to do better than they did. Emergency room waits run long, and people wait weeks for a primary care visit. Utility bills climb. Housing is out of reach in the towns where jobs are. None of these problems belongs to one party, and voters of every stripe are tired of hearing that the economy is fine.

02 The threat voters actually feel

Much of the case for reindustrialization has been made in national-security terms: China's manufacturing scale, supply-chain chokepoints, the defense industrial base. Those concerns are real, and for people in Washington or the defense industry they are urgent.

For most voters, though, geopolitical competition is abstract. The threats they feel are closer to home: whether they can afford groceries and heat, whether the next generation will get ahead, and whether the services they rely on (healthcare, schools, roads, the DMV) actually work. When Americans are asked to name the country's biggest problems, cost of living and the economy tend to rank far above foreign policy.

That gap between the story being told and the problems people feel is an opening. The builder economy can make a stronger argument by starting with the kitchen table and treating national security as a result of domestic strength, not the only reason for it.

03 Where the next wave could focus

As political attention shifts toward quality of life, several sectors are well placed to benefit from AI and deep tech.

- **Healthcare.** AI documentation and triage tools can give clinicians back hours a day. Remote monitoring, at-home diagnostics, and smarter scheduling can widen access in rural areas and underserved cities. The bottleneck is less the technology than the operators who can deploy it inside real clinics under real regulation.
- **Education.** AI tutors can give every student something close to one-on-one instruction, which used to be available only to wealthy families. Paired with a revival of skilled-trades training, this could rebuild the ladder that lets each generation do better than the last.

- **Energy.** Cheap, abundant energy underlies everything else. Casey Handmer's Terraform Industries is a useful example. Terraform is building machines that use solar power to pull carbon dioxide from the air and combine it with hydrogen from water to make synthetic natural gas. The bet is that solar power keeps getting cheaper, and that at some point making fuel from sunlight and air will cost less than drilling for it. If that bet pays off, energy becomes something the country can make at home in almost unlimited amounts.
- **Terraforming and land.** Handmer uses "terraforming" in a broad sense: reshaping land that has been treated as unusable. Cheap energy makes desalination, water pumping, and large-scale land restoration affordable. That could restore farmland, stabilize food supplies, and open up land for housing in the West.
- **Mobility.** Electrification, autonomy, and new aircraft could cut the cost and time of getting people and goods where they need to go, especially outside the major metros where public transit doesn't reach.

04 Jobs are the start, not the whole story

Every one of these sectors creates jobs, often skilled, well-paid jobs in places that lost them when manufacturing moved offshore. But the bigger payoff is what gets built: cheaper power, closer care, better schools, and more secure food. That is the part voters will actually feel.

05 What builders should do now

Policy windows open and close. Companies in these sectors should prepare now, before the swing is fully underway:

- **Tell the story in local terms.** Talk about lower bills, shorter waits, and jobs in the community. Don't lead with geopolitics.
- **Get financially ready for public capital.** Grants, loan programs, and government contracts come with compliance requirements. Build those systems before the money arrives.
- **Scale operations ahead of demand.** The companies that win a policy tailwind are the ones that can deliver when it arrives.

As Daniel Burnham, the architect and planner of Chicago, said: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work."

At Nonlinear, we help builders in energy, healthcare, and defense get their finance and operations ready for that moment. Whichever way the politics swing, the companies that make everyday life better will be the ones worth backing, and we are here to help them. ■

Nonlinear Advisors
Steady hands for nonlinear growth.

info@nonlinearadvisors.com | nonlinearadvisors.com | LinkedIn | X

Nonlinear Advisors provides finance, operations, security and strategic advisory services. It is not a CPA firm and does not provide audit or attest services. It is not a registered investment adviser or broker-dealer, does not solicit investors, and does not receive transaction-based compensation. Nothing in this piece is legal, tax or investment advice. © 2026 Nonlinear Advisors LLC, New York.