

The odds are that the Republicans will continue to control the Senate in 2018. The electoral map is very unfavorable to the Democrats, with many vulnerable Democrats up for reelection and only two such Republicans. But even if the GOP keeps control, their victory margin matters. It will determine how much maneuvering room that McConnell has to work with (currently only a single vote). The margin will also set the stage for the 2020 elections, when the Democrats face a more favorable map – if nothing else, 2018 will determine whether the Dems have to dig themselves out of a big hole in 2020. And there’s always the chance that the Senate will actually flip.

It seems like it’s about time to start thinking about these races. I identified toss-up races by examining “top 10” lists by CNN and Ballotpedia and a “top 7” list by The Hill. They all agreed on the seven races, but CNN and Ballotpedia disagreed about populating the other three slots on their lists. Trump carried five of these states — West Virginia, North Dakota, Montana, Missouri and Indiana – by over 15%. So the Democrats have their work cut out for them.

Arizona. Incumbent Jeff Flake (R) isn’t running for reelection. No matter how the race turns out, at least we can be pretty sure his replacement won’t move the Senate any further to the Right on environmental. Flake’s lifetime score of 9% from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) just doesn’t leave that much room for his replacement to go lower.

Indiana. The incumbent is Joe Donnelly (D), who has a 58% lifetime LCV score.

Missouri. The incumbent, Claire McCaskill (D), has a 74% lifetime LCV score.

Montana. The incumbent is Jon Tester (D), with an 86% lifetime LCV score. Montana gets 54% of its power from coal and 40% from renewables (33% hydro).

Nevada. Incumbent Dean Heller (R) has a 13% lifetime score from LCV. Energy issues have gained a higher profile in Nevada. Last year, the Republican governor vetoed bills that would have raised the state’s renewable portfolio standard and supported community solar systems (a popular measure with voters), but signed a bill providing net metering for rooftop solar, allowing homeowners to sell power back to the grid. Heller’s views may be a bit out of touch with the voters.

North Dakota. The incumbent, Heidi Heitkamp (D), has 50% lifetime score. As of 2015, North Dakota still got 75% of its power from coal, but wind was healthy 17% share of generation. By the following year, coal had dropped by 4% and wind had gone up by the same amount. So Heitkamp’s positions on energy and environmental issues is probably a bit

to the left of her state's but not enough to hurt her.

West Virginia. The incumbent is Joe Manchin (D), with a 44% LCV score. That's actually ten points below the score of Susan Collins, the Republican with the highest LCV score. But Collins is something of an outlier on her side of the aisle. Still, this is about all that's left of the ideological diversity the parties used to have until the 1970s. But even Manchin is a lot more pro-environmental than any likely replacement. Keep in mind that Republican Pat Toomey in West Virginia's neighbor Pennsylvania, with a lifetime score of 7%.

We'll know a lot more about these races as we get closer to summer and get a sense of who the challengers might be. It's going to be quite ride from now until November.