

Environmental issues have been surprisingly visible in this campaign – nearly every Senate candidate gives them prominent attention. The [New York Times](#) reports that they are also the third most common topic for political ads in this cycle. The evidence they report shows, not surprisingly, that coal and oil are big issues in key states: Kentucky and West Virginia for coal; Alaska and Louisiana for oil. But energy and environment are also big concerns in other states such as Michigan and Colorado where views seem more divided. What are the implications of this?

For the short-term, it means that Republicans have staked a lot on their anti-EPA positions. If they win control of the Senate, which seems likely, they will undoubtedly be under pressure to deliver something in this area. The problem is that they won't have a filibuster-proof majority on most (if not all) of these issues, they certainly won't have a veto-proof majority. So passing legislation means getting enough votes in the Senate — which requires participation by moderates just to get a majority and by some Democrats to beat a filibuster — while at the same time keeping House conservatives on board. Then there's the problem of facing down veto threats by Obama and getting him to sign the legislation. If he wants to hang tough, even "must pass" legislation could get sent back to Congress with demands that Republicans pass a "clean" bill with no riders. Maybe Republicans can score some points, at least with the base, even if bills get vetoed, but they won't have much to show for two years of congressional control if that's all they do. A tricky hand to play.

A more important question, probably, is how things will play out in the 2016 election. The blizzard of ads are financed in large part by independent sources like Tom Steyer and the Koch brothers. They're just warming up for 2016. The electoral effects in 2016 are hard to predict but could as easily favor the Democrats as the Republicans, given the generally more centrist electorate during Presidential elections. The Republicans could end up looking out of the mainstream if they're not careful. — a perennial problem for a party whose base's passionate views differ significantly from the median voter's.

A less immediate question is the long-term effects of heightening the profile of environmental issues. This may not be a great thing from the GOP point of view, since younger voters tend to be more pro-environment. According to a recent [Gallop poll](#), Americans over 65 strongly prioritize economic growth over environmental protection, but people under 30 lean the other way. The younger voters aren't necessarily a huge factor now but as they grow older they vote more. To the extent that they identify the Republicans with hostility toward the environment, this could hurt the Party in the long-run. But that's several election cycles from now at the earliest.

Putting aside the partisan aspects, raising the political profile of these issues seems like a

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good thing. One thing both sides can agree on is that these issues are really important for the future. So it's a good thing for voters to have them in mind.