

Governors' races don't get as much publicity as the national contests. Most governors' races are off-year elections, giving them even less visibility, but a minority of states do hold these elections in presidential election years. Despite their lack of national visibility, the outcomes matter. We live in a federalist system, and states have a significant ability to shape environmental and energy policy. They can cooperate with and even go beyond federal policy, or they can drag their feet and litigate every federal initiative.

This time around, there are three races that are considered very close: Indiana, North Carolina and New Hampshire. This is the first of a trio of posts covering those elections.

The Indiana governor's race is a tight battle between Democrat John Gregg and Republican Eric Holcomb. Gregg is a lawyer who has served in the past as Speaker of the Indiana House and as interim President of Vincennes University. The two have very different views of the state's environmental and energy needs.

Gregg's website highlights water issues. He calls for a massive effort to improve infrastructure for drinking water, combined sewer overflow, wastewater, and storm water drainage. He portrays these issues as urgent: "Hoosiers see the sewage overflow in the streets and in their basements. Parents get the letters from schools where water tested positive for lead and water fountains are closed." He also calls for urgent measures to address air and water pollution. As to air pollution, he says: "[o]ur poor air quality is linked to Indiana having a higher rate of cancer and lung disease deaths than cleaner states," and he observes that "Indiana ranks highest in the nation for air pollutants that cause increased respiratory symptoms, such as wheezing, coughing, and difficult or painful breathing." He also points out that "Indiana led the nation in total volume of toxic releases to waterways, with more than 17 million pounds of discharges from industrial facilities."

Holcomb's opponent, Eric Holcomb, is the current Lieutenant Governor, serving under Mike Pence. Holcomb also has an infrastructure plan, but it focuses almost entirely on transportation. Water infrastructure isn't mentioned. His website doesn't have much to say about the environment, other than a pledge to "[s]tand strong against unreasonable Federal EPA rules, like the so-called Clean Power Plan, that continue to lead to higher prices for Hoosiers."

In the past few cycles, Republicans have gained a powerful grip on state governments, with predictable implications for environment and energy policy there. Races like Indiana's will determine whether that trend continues.

