Governors' races don't get as much publicity as the national contests. But we live in a federalist system, and states help 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 last of a trio of posts covering those elections.

The New Hampshire race pits Chris Sununu(R), who won the primary by 804 votes, against Colin Van Ostern (D). Both are members of the New Hampshire Executive Council, an elected body that shares executive oversight with the governor. (Apparently, the Framers of the New Hampshire constitution weren't fans of the unitary executive theory.)

Sununu graduated for MIT and went to work for his father's business, a consulting company, before leading a buy-out of a ski resort that he now runs. His website recounts his lengthy trek on the Appalachian trail with his family. The website is thin on discussion of the issues, but does say that he "is an environmental engineer by trade and spent years cleaning up hazardous waste sites and working to implement renewable energy programs." It also talks, however, about the need to lower energy prices, which is often a code word for loosening pollution restrictions. Sununu has referred to the Department of Environmental Services as a "regulatory police state" and spoken more generally about the need for deregulation.

Van Ostern has been a brand manager for a large organic yoghurt manufacturer (which fits more with my concept of Vermont than New Hampshire). His website has much more to say about environmental issues. It touts his support for renewable energy:

"Van Ostern is a strong advocate for clean solar and renewable energy projects that are critical for boosting our clean tech economy, limiting energy costs, protecting our environment, and creating thousands of jobs. That's why he worked successfully to bring new solar and renewable energy projects to Manchester, Portsmouth, Durham, Milton, Plymouth, Peterborough, and Berlin."

His website also stresses preservation of state parks and protection for drinking water. In a public debate, he challenged Sununu's stance on energy projects: "Over and over again, he has voted against, more I think than any politician in the state of

New Hampshire’s history, voted against solar and renewable energy projects. I think that holds our state back and holds our economy back.”

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 New Hampshire’s will determine whether that trend continues.