

In the Trump era, states have become crucial to any hope of moving climate policy forward. That makes gubernatorial elections more crucial than ever.

With that in mind, I've taken a look at crucial governors' races to check out the potential effect on climate policy. My selection of states is based on lists of key races as [Politico](#) and [Cook Political](#). It's a bit too early to start thinking about what the November match-ups will be, except in Illinois where the primaries are held early. But you can see the potential for change simply by looking at the policies of the incumbent. I checked on their climate views [here](#) and then looked into their records on renewable energy.

The East Coast and Southeast

- **Connecticut** Gov. Daniel Malloy (D) is retiring. Good pick-up opportunity for Republicans. Malloy has been a strong advocate for climate action and has pushed hard to increase renewable energy. Hard to know where a GOP successor might stand.
- **Florida** Gov. Rick Scott (R) is term-limited. Florida is the paradigm of the ostrich with its head in the sand. It may be the most vulnerable state to climate change. Yet, the state government is assiduously ignoring the problem even though some cities and counties and South Florida are keenly aware of the risks. Even after Hurricane Irma, Scott still [professed](#) complete uncertainty on the subject: "Clearly our environment changes all the time, and whether that's cycles we're going through or whether that's man-made, I wouldn't be able to tell you which one it is."
- **Maine** Republican Gov. Paul LePage (R) is term-limited. He's also about as bad as you can get: a climate denier, hates renewable energy, and believes that climate change could benefit his state anyway. He won't be running for reelection, but a conservative Republican successor would be likely to continue his policies more quietly. Or a Democrat could start moving the state in the opposite direction.
- **Maryland** Gov. Larry Hogan (R) is running for reelection. He's another who is "not sure" of the cause of climate change. He also refused to join the U.S. Climate Alliance. Will he continue his efforts to slow progress or be replaced by a Democrat who will take a leadership role on climate issues?

The Midwest

- **Illinois**. Gov. Rauner is running for reelection. He's dodged questions about

climate change but believes that fossil fuels are “massive job creators.” He did sign major legislation expanding renewables as part of a deal to prop up some nuclear plants by giving them credit for their zero-carbon electricity generation. According to his website, the Democratic candidate, J.B. Pritzker, wants to “put Illinois on a path toward 100% clean, renewable energy and attract commercial investment in clean energy production and transmission here in Illinois.” Given the Democrats’ firm control of the state legislature, Pritzker would be in a position to push new legislation addressing climate change.

- **Michigan** Gov. Rick Snyder (R) is term-limited. As of 2015, he said he believed in the existence of climate change but not necessarily that it was caused by human activities. He has been fairly moderate in terms of energy policy. At the end of 2016, he brokered a deal to raise Michigan’s renewable portfolio standard from 10% to 15%. (The 10% mandate was established by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who now teaches at Berkeley’s public policy school.) As in Illinois, a Democratic governor might be able to go much further in climate policy.
- **Minnesota**. Cook views this as a toss-up. Mark Dayton has called for eventual elimination of coal and has taken strong steps to expand solar. Republicans have only a one-vote margin in the state senate, but they control the state house 77-57. Minnesota has been a Democratic stronghold in presidential elections, but Clinton carried it by less than 2%. (Interestingly, Green Party candidate Jill Stein wasn’t much of a factor. She came in below the Libertarian candidate and independent Evan McMullin, which might be a sign of Republican defections.) If the new governor turns out to be a conservative Republican, a lot of the ground gained under Dayton is likely to be lost.
- **Ohio** Gov. John Kasich (R) is term-limited. Kasich [issued](#) a strong statement condemning Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris agreement. Ohio has a weak renewable portfolio standard. Utilities are required to obtain a percentage of their energy from renewable sources, with amounts rising steadily from less than 1% when the law was passed to 12.5% in 2026. Apparently, these percentages were still too high to suit the Ohio legislature, which passed a bill to freeze the standards. Kasich vetoed the law. [Kasich](#) credited Ohio’s “wide range of energy generation options” with helping to grow jobs in the state over the past six years.” But Kasich, like Susan Collins in the Senate, is an outlier within the Republican party. If he is replaced by a more typical Republican, Ohio could well backslide.

The West

- **New Mexico** Gov. Susana Martinez (R) is term-limited. Her view on climate change was “I’m not sure the science completely supports that.” She repealed a regulation calling for 3% annual cuts in greenhouse gases. The state has barely tapped its solar potential, and Democrats in the legislature are [pushing](#) for the state to do more.
- **Nevada** Gov. Brian Sandoval (R) is term-limited. Sandoval refused to take a stand on climate change but touted his support for reducing coal and increased renewables. Nevertheless, he vetoed a bill that would have increased in renewables generation to 40% by 2030 and 80% by 2040. A Democratic successor would sign such legislation.

No doubt, the political situation will continue to evolve between now and November, now just over eight months away. But as of now, these nine states seem more likely to be in play. They cover a lot of territory, including much of the Midwest, which has remained a heavy user of coal. If you’re interested in energy and climate policy, keep on eye on these races.