In the Tar Heel State, Republican Incumbent Thom Tillis faces a tough face against challenger Cal Cunningham. This race is central to Democratic hopes to flip the Senate. The candidates have contrasting environmental views.

Thom Tillis. When Tillis ran in 2014, his main claim to fame was championing deregulation in the North Carolina legislature, which endeared him to the Tea Party. His campaign website doesn't have an issues tab. (My impression is that this is more common for Republicans, but I'm not sure what to make of that.) Some of his positions, like support for offshore oil drilling, aren't popular in North Carolina, which may help explain his silence.

Interestingly, his Senate website says he favors "addressing climate change through market-based solutions that foster innovation and drive economic growth" and touts his support for solar energy. His recognition that climate change is real marks a shift from his last Senate race. Back then, he answered "no" when an interviewer asked him about the reality of climate change.

Tillis's lifetime score with the League of Conservation Voters is 9%, but his 2020 score was 21%. There's a similar discrepancy with Martha McSally (R-AZ), who I discussed last week. This seems to be true of many GOP Senators, but I can't tell whether this is due to a shift in the party's positions or whether the key environmental votes in 2019 involved unusual issues.

Cal Cunningham. Cunningham's website describes him as a small town lawyer who people injured by environmental hazards. He's also general counsel of an environmental services company, WasteZero. After 9/11, he joined the Reserves and received a Bronze Star for his service in Iraq.

His website calls for climate action:

"North Carolina has seen the effects of climate change firsthand through the historic storms and flooding that have ravaged our state — which is why Cal knows this is one of the most urgent issues facing us. He believes that in order to combat this crisis, we need to invest in a clean energy economy that will create good-paying jobs, reduce carbon pollution, and make North Carolina a leader."

The website adds: "Cal is proud to have been endorsed by the League of Conservation Voters and the Sierra Club for his strong commitment to fighting climate change and building a clean energy economy."

Tillis isn’t as violently anti-environmental as Tom Cotton or Florida’s Mario Rubio and Rick Scott. But that’s a very low bar. Cal Cunningham, on the other hand, is someone who will take a strong stance for climate action. The choice between them may also determine whether we have a Senate where Chuck Schumer or Mitch McConnell is calling the shots — which obviously is like day and night in terms of environmental policy.