

Last week, I posted about the Montana Senate race. Montana also has a tight race for governor. The candidates are the current Democratic Lieutenant Governor Mike Cooney and House Republican Greg Gianforte. Cooney is a long-time figure in state politics.

Gianforte founded a “customer relationship software company.” He got national attention in 2017 when he assaulted a reporter and knocked him down. Gianforte pled guilty, did community service, apologized, and donated \$50,000 to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The two have starkly different environmental views.

Mike Cooney (D). According to his website, “Mike Cooney knows climate change is real and knows it’s going to take all of us to make a meaningful difference. He’s committed to bringing everyone to the table . . . to ensure they are protected from further negative impacts of a changing climate.” He views to carry on the legacy of the outgoing governor, who joined the U.S. Climate Alliance. The website also reports that “Mike has a proven record—and 100% rating from Montana Conservation Voters—of protecting our natural heritage and securing access to our public lands for all Montanans.”

Greg Gianforte (R) Gianforte has a 5% score for his 2019 votes from the League of Conservation Voters, and a 3% lifetime score. Those scores on the low side for a Republican, especially the 2019 score because there was some environmentally related legislation that 2019 that attracted significant GOP support.

One of the issue tabs on Gianforte’s website is “Standing with Trump,” which gives you a sense of his general political stance. He has said that human activities are one contributing factor to climate change but opposes regulation or a carbon tax. He was opposed to the Paris Agreement.

Gianforte’s “Montana Comeback Plan” says Montana is called the “Treasure State” because of its coal, oil, minerals and timber, which he wants to exploit more fully. He calls for streamlining the permit process, cutting regulation, putting more development-friendly leadership in environmental agencies — and yet, somehow, at the same time he will preserve Montana’s environment. Gianforte’s plan does not contain a single mention of renewable energy.

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Montana is a major coal producer, but gets about half of its own power from hydro and wind. It has a lot of unused wind potential, and the next Governor may shape how much the state invests in that versus trying to protect its coal industry.

