When election night rolls around about a month from now, keep on eye on Governors' races. They tend not to get national attention, but they're critical in terms of state climate and energy policy. Although governorships were once considered relatively weak offices, they have generally accrued greater power, just as Presidents have done at the federal level. Who's steering state government matters. States are key players in the energy transition. The Federal Power Act assignees regulation of electricity generators to states, not FERC, and state climate policies have had to fill the gap created by the lack of any consistent federal policy.

One state (Kansas) seems likely to flip to the Republicans. But control of the governor's mansion is up for grabs in about five states. In a wave election, Democrats could hold one of those states and flip the other four. As usual, rather than pretending to be a political expert myself, I'm relying on the Sabato and Cook websites for guidance. Here are the five states to keep an eye on. Cook rates all of them as toss-ups, but Sabato's views are more mixed. Trump carried all these states in 2024, but they clearly aren't safe Republican territory today.

Alaska. Cook shifted this race to a toss-up only a couple of weeks ago. The Republicans actually have three candidates in this race due to Alaska's runoff system: Bernadette Wilson (a businesswoman) Dave Bronson (former mayor of Anchorage), and Treg Taylor (former state attorney general). The sole Democrat is Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (former state election). There are a substantial number of undecided. Alaska uses ranked choice voting, which makes predictions more difficult. But some simulations show Kreiss-Tomkins as likely to prevail. Republican voters spread out among a lot of candidates in the primary, which adds to the unpredictability. [10/6 update: Sabato now rates this case as "Leans Democratic."

Georgia. The outgoing Governor is Republican Brian Kemp, who is term limited. He's had some notable scrapes with Trump. Rick Jackson, the Republican nominee, is the owner of a healthcare company. The Democratic nominee is Keisha Lance Bottoms, a former mayor of Atlanta who served in the Biden Administration.

Iowa. This was considered a toss-up race earlier, but Cook and Sabato have both switched it to "Lean D." ***Zach Lan (R)*** is a businessman, while *Bob Sand (D*) is the state auditor. Lan's website doesn't mention energy issues and mentions the environment only in connection with the importance of clean water. Sand's website puts a lot of emphasis on nitrates on water, controlling manure, and preserving wetlands.

Nevada (Sabato views as leaning Republican.) ***Joe Lombardo*** is the Republican incumbent. Lombardo's website touts the number of regulations he's repealed but says nothing about their substance.

He's opposed by the Democratic state AG, ***Aaron Ford***. Given how little other candidates are talking about energy issues, I was excited to see that he actually has a tab on his webpage for energy issues. It's mostly focused on affordability. He does say that by "facilitating residential solar installation and energy efficiency incentives," he will "balance affordability and sustainability to lower costs for all Nevadans."

Ohio (Sabato viewed as leaning Republican but now views as a toss-up.) The Republican candidate is ***Vivek Ramaswamy***, who you may remember from earlier presidential primaries. His energy statement has two prongs. The first is: "Expand natural gas and deploy innovative energy technologies to strengthen Ohio's energy supply and reduce electric bills for every family." The second is: "Streamline energy project permits and remove unnecessary regulations so projects get built on time and on budget." That's not a lot but more than other Republican candidates have been saying.

The Democratic candidate is ***Amy Acton***. Her discussion of energy emphasizes affordability and says that she'll "lower energy bills for Ohioans by enhancing production and incorporating the lowest-cost and cleanest sources of energy." She also has a tab on data centers and calls for building them on brownfields. She also says that under her, "Ohio won't loosen our air quality and groundwater standards for data centers."

Wisconsin (Sabato views as leaning Democratic). ***Tom Tiffany*** is the Republican candidate. He has an interesting background as the owner of a wilderness cruise company. He was also a member of Congress, where he earned a 1% lifetime score from the League of Conservation Voters. So not much of a wilderness champion after all.

David Crowley is the Democratic candidate, having scored a surprise upset against a Progressive opponent. He's been a member of the state legislature and the county executive for Milwaukee County and a state legislator. His website has a lot to say about data centers. In terms of their energy use, he wants to "establish clear environmental guardrails on water usage, energy sourcing, stringent energy-efficiency building codes, and emissions so data center growth doesn't come at the

expense of Wisconsin communities or natural resources.” He’s also an enthusiast for solar and wants among other things to allow plug-in solar.

You’ll notice that four of these “close call” states are Midwestern, an indication that what is often considered the heartland is politically in play.

****

Sabato has a useful rating change tab. Two changes (Florida and Montana) showed Republicans solidifying leads. But all the other changes have been in the direction of the Democrats. If that continues, prospects for Republicans could turn really sour.

In addition to winning the toss-up states, if Democrats have a really good night, they might hold Kansas, which Cook and Sabato now view as leaning Republican. There could also be some big surprises in races that are considered “likely” wins for one party or another, especially if this turns into a huge wave election. There are enough toss-up races, however, to provide plenty of suspense even if nothing totally unexpected happens. And we don’t know how much the GOP’s funding advantage could change the picture. in the remaining weeks until Election Day.

LATER NEWS: Breaking news: Cook just moved the Texas and Florida races from likely Republican to lean Republican, which means they’re in play. (Oct. 1)