Summary

Looking at the current leading Republican and Democratic contenders for the Presidential nomination, there's a huge gap between the parties on climate change and clean energy. There are interesting nuances, however, within each party.

The midterms are over, which means that the Presidential election has begun in earnest. We can't tell yet who the nominees will be. In fact, since 2008, Presidents have tended not to be the obvious nominees when the campaign began. Still, we can at least get a sense of what the field looks like and how the potential candidates differ in their views about climate change and clean energy.

Let's start with the Republicans. Vance, Rubio, and Cruz seem to be the three who are mentioned most often at this point.

JD Vance has quickly morphed from clean energy advocate to Trump clone. Until at least 2020, Vance said we "have a climate problem" and needed to move to solar energy. When seeking Trump's support for his Ohio Senate bid, Vance reversed direction, and he actively opposed clean energy as a Senator. He managed to achieve a lifetime score from the League of Conservation Voters (LCF) of 0%, apparently never voting for anything that favored the environment. Presumably, that wasn't a problem when Trump picked him as V.P. As Veep, his stance seems indistinguishable from Trump's.

Marco Rubio also went through a metamorphosis, though not quite as abruptly as Vance. As Florida House Speaker he favored clean energy, energy efficiency, and rooftop solar, but he reversed course as a Senator. Rubio had a lifetime score LCV score of 7% in the Senate, making him a flaming environmentalist compared to Vance's zero score. As a Trump subordinate in his present position, he echoes the party line, like Vance.

Ted Cruz is a climate denier and believes that China is behind lawsuits against oil companies. His lifetime LCV score is 3%, right between Vance and Rubio. He has favored an all-of-the-above approach, including wind and solar, which makes sense in term of Texas's energy mix. For example, two years ago, he posted, "Oil, gas, wind, solar, nuclear — Texas is the energy capital of the world." His support for renewables alongside fossil fuels used to the be the standard Republican position. Weirdly, today it places the arch-conservative Cruz to the left of Rubio and Vance.

On the Democratic side, support for climate action is widespread but there are differences in degree. The Democratic field is larger and more fluid than the Republican field, where one person will carry outsized weight. There seems to be a consensus that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) and Gavin Newsom are serious contenders, but after that things become more debatable. Jon Ossoff also makes the lists a lot, although he says that he has no interest in running. Could be true, but since everyone says that until they do they announce, the statement doesn't mean much. It's certainly easy to imagine that others such as Andy Besheer or Peter Buttegieg might make serious runs. I decided to stick to the first three as at least indicative of the kind of candidates the party might favor.

AOC clearly represents the progressive wing of the party. She has a lifetime LCV score of 98%. She introduced the Green New Deal in Congress along with Sen. Ed Markey. But she proved pragmatic in the runup to passage of Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, leading to some criticism from the Left.

Gavin Newsom has been a stronger supporter of climate action during his time as governor of California. However, he's been willing to bend where necessary given pressure to keep gas prices under control and respond to pressure for greater affordability.

Jon Ossoff has an LCV score of 96%. He opposed the Green New Deal and introduced bills to boost solar manufacturing and subsidize solar panels and energy efficiency for lower-income groups. He has also been a spokesman for renewable energy in international gatherings.

There's obviously a huge gulf between all the Republicans and all the Democrats I've discussed. That's not a surprise: there is about a 30% gap between the LCV scores of the most liberal Republican (Susan Collins) and the most conservative Dermocrat (John Fetterman). There are some nuanced variation, however, within each party.

Six months from now, the list of contenders might look quite different. But at least for now, that's what the situation looks like.