

NC Debate Guide

Winning On Climate Change In North Carolina Debates

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WHY CLIMATE ACTION IS A WINNING ISSUE IN NORTH CAROLINA

The politics of climate have changed and embracing bold climate action is a winning message. Climate change is a defining issue for key voting blocs – younger voters, voters of color, and suburban women strongly believe we need bold, climate action and a more just and equitable economy now. Voters also don't buy the Republican climate deniers' lies about climate action and are tired of putting oil and gas CEOs profits ahead of working families.

The climate crisis is here. Scientists around the globe are warning us if we don't heed the advice of experts and take action to address climate change, it may be too late to avoid catastrophic consequences. In North Carolina, the impacts of climate change will mean [more droughts, stronger storms, rising sea levels, more flooding, hotter temperatures](#). The state's agriculture, it's economy and people's health will all be hurt .

- North Carolina has [seen eight hurricanes](#) in the past decade that caused a total of \$336.2 billion in damages and 551 deaths.
- Currently, more than 450,000 people are [at risk](#) of inland flooding in North Carolina.
- Studies show Black North Carolinians are almost [twice as likely](#) to live near an EPA-registered polluter than white residents.

That is why it is critical to have a robust discussion about how we tackle the climate crisis and fight for environmental justice during debates. Strong majorities of North Carolinians (and American voters) believe climate change is happening now and are worried about its effects. [60% of North Carolinians](#) believe both the President and Congress should do more to address climate change, as do [71 percent of American voters](#).

CANDIDATE BACKGROUNDS

CAL CUNNINGHAM

Cunningham [opposes](#) opening up the North Carolina coast to offshore drilling, and [supports](#) making the U.S. carbon neutral by 2050. Cunningham has also called for the U.S. to rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, and has [called for](#) training workers for green jobs and [investing](#) in clean energy research and development. Unlike [Tillis](#), Cunningham firmly [opposes](#) opening North Carolina's coastline to offshore drilling.

THOM TILLIS

Thom Tillis was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2014 after serving as the Speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, where he [opposed action](#) on climate change and [clean energy](#). In his last campaign, Tillis called climate change "[false science](#)" and since joining the Senate, has continued to [support offshore drilling](#) while standing in the way of [climate solutions](#).

CONFRONTING THE CRISIS

IF YOU SAY ONE THING

The climate crisis is here, and it's already hurting our economy, our health, and our security. We cannot afford to wait any longer to act.

KEY MESSAGE

The climate crisis is here. We see it in the strange and severe weather that happens more frequently and causes more damage to our communities. This isn't opinion – it's fact. It's also fact that we are running out of time to act. Scientists, experts, and economists say that if we don't take steps now to combat climate change, the damage may be irreversible. But Thom Tillis is in denial – and that rejection of science and fact will doom our children to a future filled with droughts, flooding, food and water shortages, and more.

COMPARE RECORDS

- Cal Cunningham told the [News & Observer](#) "Climate change is one of the most urgent issues we face. We need to invest in a clean energy economy that will create good-paying jobs, reduce carbon pollution, and make North Carolina a leader. I support efforts to move to 100% renewable energy by 2050, rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement, and retrain workers for green energy jobs. North Carolina can be a leader. Solar energy is spreading, providing good-paying jobs and economic investment in rural areas. We also need green and sustainable investments in infrastructure in North Carolina to help drive the economic growth of the future"
- While Thom Tillis was Speaker of the House in North Carolina, the legislature [passed a law](#) banning the use of scientific predictions of sea level rise in "any state rules, plans, or policies."
- In a 2014 debate, Thom Tillis referred to climate change as "[false science](#)"
- Thom Tillis [voted against](#) an amendment that would have expressed the Sense of Congress that climate change is real, and that man-made pollution is a significant contributor to climate change.

GET THE FACTS

- [66% of North Carolinians](#) believe in climate change, and [58% of the state's residents](#) are worried about climate change.
- [60% of North Carolinians](#) believe both the President and Congress should do more to address climate change
- In the past decade, North Carolina has [experienced](#) 35 climate-related disasters responsible for a total of \$405.6 billion in damages.
 - North Carolina has [seen eight hurricanes](#) in the past decade that caused a total of \$336.2 billion in damages and 551 deaths.
- The last ten years are the warmest on record for North Carolina with [2019 the hottest year on record](#). Temperatures are [likely to increase by 2-5°](#).
- Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Florence in 2018 were only 23 months apart and were both [500-year storms](#).
- [More frequent and intense droughts](#) are expected in North Carolina due to climate change which will create water shortages and the risk of wildfires.
- The state of North Carolina says it is [virtually certain flooding from storm surges will increase](#) because of the rise of the sea level.
- Climate change will [cost](#) North Carolina \$20,207,328,000 a year by the year 2100.
- By 2100, 100,000 homes in North Carolina at an estimated worth of \$28.5 billion [will face flooding](#). Those homes at risk [currently contribute](#) around \$187 million in annual property tax revenue.
- In 2017, agriculture [represented](#) one-sixth of North Carolina's economy, generating over \$91.8 billion in gross state product and employing 728,000 workers.
- Climate change is [projected](#) to cause a 10.66% loss in crop yields in North Carolina, including a 30.8% loss in grains.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

IF YOU SAY ONE THING

We have a responsibility to leave a better world for our children and grandchildren, and Thom Tillis is threatening our nation's role as a global leader on climate and clean energy.

KEY MESSAGE

We have a responsibility to leave a better world for our children and grandchildren, but we've fallen behind and let other nations displace us. This threatens our economy and national security. There are ambitious investments we should make that will help us meet the scale of this challenge and lead the world in building an equitable, clean energy economy.

COMPARE RECORDS

- In 2017, Thom Tillis joined 21 other Republican Senators in [signing a letter](#) to President Trump urging him to exit the Paris agreement.
- Cal Cunningham told the [News & Observer](#) "Climate change is one of the most urgent issues we face. We need to invest in a clean energy economy that will create good-paying jobs, reduce carbon pollution, and make North Carolina a leader. I support efforts to move to 100% renewable energy by 2050, rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement, and retrain workers for green energy jobs."

GET THE FACTS

- The U.S. is already falling behind as other nations, including China and countries in Europe, move forward on clean energy jobs of the future. China is [already](#) the world's largest producer of solar panels, and last year European nations [installed](#) more solar infrastructure than the U.S.
- Electric vehicles represent the future of the auto industry (the backbone of the U.S. economy), which we can't afford to cede to China ([the world's largest auto buyer](#)), and Europe ([the world leader in EV investment](#)).

- Led by government climate policy, Europe [attracted](#) \$71 billion in electric vehicles investment in 2019, outpacing China and the U.S.
- The Chinese government, which had [already invested](#) \$60 billion into electric vehicles before the pandemic, is placing electric vehicles at [the center](#) of their coronavirus recovery package with extensions to tax breaks for electric vehicles and an investment in growing the number of charging stations by tenfold, all with an eye to [increase](#) electric vehicles from 5% of the market to 25% in the next 5 years.
- Researchers at CSIS [warn](#) that if China takes too much of a lead, it will threaten the U.S. ability to compete in the growing market.
- At the start of the Trump administration, exiting the Paris climate agreement was a high priority on the wish lists of coal baron [Bob Murray](#) and the oil billionaire [Koch brothers](#).
- Trump [cherry picked](#) jobs data from a faulty study to justify leaving the Paris Agreement.
- Remaining in the Paris climate agreement would actually [save](#) the U.S. over half a trillion dollars annually, while doing nothing on climate change comes at an annual cost of \$698.77 billion.
- [Researchers found](#) that honoring the Paris Agreement would create 24 million jobs around the world by 2030 by growing the renewables sector and related industries.
 - The study also found that if left unchecked, [climate change will destroy jobs](#).
- Major employers, including GE, Disney, and Apple [disagreed](#) with Trump's 2017 decision to withdraw the U.S. from the pact, arguing that staying in the agreement would create jobs by spurring investment, increasing American competitiveness in and access to international markets, encouraging innovation, and reducing business risk associated with climate change.
 - In late 2019, they joined with the Chair of the International Committee of AFL-CIO in a [letter](#) re-asserting their support.
- At least 290 cities and counties, 10 states, and 2,275 businesses have said they are "still in" and [pledged to stick to the goals](#) of the Paris agreement.

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- Cities like Asheville, Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and Winston-Salem are “[still in](#)”
- 38 North Carolina businesses, including Volvo Group North America in Greensboro are “[still in](#)”

OFFSHORE DRILLING

IF YOU SAY ONE THING

Coastal tourism and recreation are vital to North Carolina's economy, but Thom Tillis would put all of that at risk for the benefit of the big oil CEOs who have funded his campaigns.

KEY MESSAGE

Recreational fishing alone is a \$3 billion industry that supports more than 30 thousand jobs in North Carolina. The industry is already at risk because of climate change and, if Thom Tillis has his way, could be sold to the oil and gas CEOs who want to drill off North Carolina's coast. Tillis has also taken more than a half a million dollars in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry. We can't let Thom Tillis sell our coast to the highest bidder.

COMPARE RECORDS

- Cal Cunningham [opposes offshore drilling](#)
- Thom Tillis [filed an amendment](#) to a pipeline bill to advance offshore drilling on North Carolina's coast.
- Thom Tillis said he was "[extremely disappointed](#)" in the Obama administration's decision to protect North Carolina's coasts from offshore drilling.
- Thom Tillis cosponsored and [voted for S. 3110](#), the American Energy and Conservation Act of 2016, which would incentivize offshore drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf.

GET THE FACTS

- Outdoor recreation in North Carolina [supports](#) 260,000 jobs and \$28 billion in consumer spending. In 2018, tourism [generated](#) \$25.3 billion in visitor spending and supported more than 230,000 jobs.
 - North Carolina's Outer Banks' tourism industry produced [\\$255.4 million](#) for the local economy in 2018.

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- Recreational fishing off North Carolina's coast is a [\\$3 billion industry](#) that supports over 30,166 jobs.
- Thom Tillis has received over [\\$500,288 in campaign contributions](#) from the oil and gas industry.

CLEAN ENERGY JOBS

IF YOU SAY ONE THING

Clean energy means good-paying jobs for rural North Carolina, so why wouldn't you want to support this growing industry?

KEY MESSAGE

North Carolina already leads the country in clean energy jobs in rural communities. This is an industry that pays higher hourly wages than most other jobs while providing cheap, pollution-free power, but Thom Tillis has repeatedly stood in the way of transitioning to a clean energy future. The only people who stand to lose are fossil fuel CEOs, like those who have given more than a half million dollars to Tillis' campaign.

COMPARE RECORDS

- Cal Cunningham told the [News & Observer](#) "Climate change is one of the most urgent issues we face. We need to invest in a clean energy economy that will create good-paying jobs, reduce carbon pollution, and make North Carolina a leader. I support efforts to move to 100% renewable energy by 2050, rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement, and retrain workers for green energy jobs. North Carolina can be a leader. Solar energy is spreading, providing good-paying jobs and economic investment in rural areas. We also need green and sustainable investments in infrastructure in North Carolina to help drive the economic growth of the future"
- Thom Tillis [voted twice](#) to block the Clean Power Plan from being implemented, and once to [repeal it](#).
- As a state legislator, Tillis [opposed](#) North Carolina's renewable energy standard and [tried to repeal it](#).
- In the US Senate, Tillis [voted repeatedly against](#) investments in clean energy.

GET THE FACTS

- Thom Tillis has received over [\\$500,288 in campaign contributions](#) from the oil and gas industry.
- The Clean Power Plan would have created [560,000 new clean energy jobs](#).
- North Carolina [already leads the country](#) for clean energy jobs in rural areas, with the sector employing nearly 29,000 workers in rural areas in 2019.
- Renewable energy projects have [invested \\$28.2 billion](#) in North Carolina from 2007-2018, with 32% of that total coming just in 2017 and 2018.
- North Carolina was [ranked](#) ninth among the top 10 states for clean energy employment in 2019, with the sector employing 112,720 workers.
- In 2019, North Carolina was home to 6,617 jobs in the [solar industry](#) and 1,001 to 2,000 direct jobs in the [wind industry](#).
- Hourly wages for clean energy jobs [exceed](#) national averages by 8 to 19 percent, the clean energy economy offers more [opportunities](#) for low and middle-skilled workers than the national economy, and educational barriers to entry are [lower](#) in clean energy jobs, even in high paying positions.
- Most clean energy jobs are [local by nature](#), and clean energy companies support a range of secondary jobs in their local areas.
- Wind energy is [cheaper](#) than natural gas, and in 2018, the [sector alone](#) paid \$1 billion to state and local governments and private landowners in tax and lease payments, and supported a supply chain of 500 factories in 42 states employing 24,000 workers.
- Clean energy companies [hire](#) a greater percentage of veterans than the national average, with veterans [filling](#) around 10 percent of the nation's advanced clean energy jobs. Clean energy also [employs](#) more veterans than the oil and gas industry.
- The renewable energy sector is [more diverse](#) than the workforce overall: it is less white, employs more workers who identify as Hispanic or Latinx, and employs 3 to 5 times more workers who identify as two or more races than the national average.

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- Clean energy jobs provide a [long-proven](#) path to stability and reintegration for formerly incarcerated citizens, who were [unemployed](#) at a rate of 27 percent in 2018 and face over 45,000 [barriers](#) to reintegration.
- Electric vehicles represent the future of the auto industry (the backbone of the U.S. economy), which we can't afford to cede to China ([the world's largest auto buyer](#)), and Europe ([the world leader in EV investment](#)).
 - Led by government climate policy, Europe [attracted](#) \$71 billion in electric vehicles investment in 2019, outpacing China and the U.S.
 - The Chinese government, which had [already invested](#) \$60 billion into electric vehicles before the pandemic, is placing electric vehicles at [the center](#) of their coronavirus recovery package with extensions to tax breaks for electric vehicles and an investment in growing the number of charging stations by tenfold, all with an eye to [increase](#) electric vehicles from 5% of the market to 25% in the next 5 years.
 - Researchers at CSIS [warn](#) that if China takes too much of a lead, it will threaten the U.S. ability to compete in the growing market.
- The U.S. hit 1 million [electric vehicles sales](#) in 2018.

CLIMATE CHANGES TOUCHES EVERY ISSUE IN 2020 POLITICAL DEBATES

You don't have to wait for a question about climate change to highlight how climate change touches nearly every major issue that might come up in a political debate. Here are some examples of how you can talk about climate change in a variety of different contexts.

THE ECONOMY

Ignoring The Climate Crisis Will Harm North Carolina's Economy:

- Climate change will [cost](#) North Carolina \$20.2 billion a year by the year 2100.
- In 2017, agriculture [represented](#) one-sixth of North Carolina's economy, generating more than \$91.8 billion in gross state product and employing 728,000 workers.
- Climate change is [projected](#) to cause a 10.66% loss in crop yields in North Carolina, including a 30.8% loss in grains.

Investing In Clean Energy Future Means Good Jobs For North Carolina:

- North Carolina [leads the country](#) for clean energy jobs in rural areas, with the sector employing nearly 29,000 workers in rural areas in 2019.
- North Carolina was [ranked](#) ninth among the top 10 states for clean energy employment in 2019, with the sector employing 112,720 workers.
- In 2019, North Carolina was home to 6,617 jobs in the [solar industry](#) and 1,001 to 2,000 direct jobs in the [wind industry](#).

HEALTH CARE

Climate Change And Fossil Fuel Pollutants Give People Pre-Existing Conditions And Make Them More Vulnerable To COVID-19:

- New research on air pollution has found that [burning fossil fuel](#) causes 230,000 premature deaths in the US every year.

CLIMATE POWER 2020

- Scientists and health experts from 35 academic institutions and United Nations agencies said that [children will suffer from a rise in infectious diseases, malnutrition and air pollution](#) if global warming continues on the current trajectory.
- The [American Lung Association](#) warns that pollution from vehicle exhaust and power plants can cause lung cancer, heart disease, and asthma attacks.
- Soot air pollution (PM2.5) causes severe health problems and it [increased by 5.5 percent](#) on average across the country between 2016 and 2018, after decreasing nearly 25 percent over the previous seven years.
 - Soot air pollution (PM2.5) [from power plants and vehicle exhaust](#) has been [linked to higher death rates](#) from COVID-19

NATIONAL SECURITY

Climate Change Is A National Security Threat, Both Abroad And Right Here At Home:

- [National security experts](#) and the [Department of Defense](#) have published reports warning that climate change puts our national security at risk by destabilizing conflict zones.
- Our ability to respond to conflicts is also being impacted. A [2019 report](#) from the Department of Defense found that climate change is already [threatening mission-critical bases](#).
 - North Carolina's Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point is [impacted](#) by current and potential future flooding, while Fort Bragg is [impacted](#) by current and potential future wildfires.

FOREIGN POLICY & TRADE

The U.S. Risks Falling Behind On Emerging Clean Energy Industries While The Rest Of The World Is Making Investments In Their Future:

- The U.S. is already falling behind to China and Europe. In 2017, [nearly half](#) of the world's new renewable energy investment came from China, and the nation is the [world's largest producer](#) of solar panels, wind turbines, batteries and electric vehicles. In 2019, the U.S. added 13 GW of

[solar installations](#), while Europe added 16.7 and the previous year, China added 44 GW.

- Electric vehicles represent the future of the auto industry (the backbone of the U.S. economy), which we can't afford to cede to China ([the world's largest auto buyer](#)), and Europe ([the world leader in EV investment](#)).
 - Led by government climate policy, Europe [attracted](#) \$71 billion in electric vehicles investment in 2019, outpacing China and the U.S.
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 - Researchers at CSIS [warn](#) that if China takes too much of a lead, it will threaten the U.S. ability to compete in the growing market.

IMMIGRATION

Unchecked Climate Change Will Only Increase Pressure On Our Borders:

- Poverty and violence in Central America are major factors [driving migration](#) to the United States.
- Drought and disasters driven by climate change will [continue to exacerbate](#) poor economic conditions that leave people in desperate situations with no options.
- [A recent scientific paper](#) predicts that the parts of the globe that best support human life and crops will shift more in the next 50 years than they have in the last 6,000 years, sparking [mass migrations](#) as people move to escape heat, hunger, and political chaos.

JUSTICE & CIVIL RIGHTS

Environmental Justice Is Racial Justice:

- Studies show Black North Carolinians are almost [twice as likely](#) to live near an EPA-registered polluter than white residents.

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- Mecklenburg County, whose [population](#) is over 30% Black and over 13% Hispanic, [received](#) an F grade for its 2019 ozone levels.
- Ozone has been [linked](#) to asthma, and Black children are [four times](#) more likely to be admitted to the hospital and [ten times](#) more likely to die from asthma.
- Swain County, whose [population](#) is almost 28 percent American Indian and Alaska Native and experiences a 20.9 percent poverty rate, [received](#) an F grade for particle pollution in 2019.
- Communities of color in North Carolina continue to fight against water and air pollution caused by [industrial hog farms](#), [wood burning facilities](#) and [pipelines](#).