*Joe D’Aleo: As I’ve said I’ve had the privilege of knowing and working some with John and his -son Michael over the last six years. I’ve learned much from that association. I’m confident you’ll feel the same after today, it’s my distinct honor to introduce governor John Henry Sununu. [applause]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: This is Joe D’Aleo — a meteorologist who doesn’t believe human activity is driving global warming — introducing John H. Sununu in 2013.**

**Annie Ropeik: Sununu served as governor of New Hampshire for six years, from 1983 to 1989. In political circles he’s famous for being a rhetorical knife-fighter, an attack dog, and an expert crafter of incendiary sound-bites.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: And that’s Annie Ropeik, environment reporter in New Hampshire Public Radio’s newsroom.**

*John H. Sununu: Thank you very much Joe. We’ve gathered to bring some reality and some sound science to the ongoing debate on climate change and global warming.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: John H. Sununu is famously whip-smart. He** [**reportedly scored**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1988/11/28/is-176-iq-enough-in-white-house/c0535981-650c-4c33-a233-78babc3006e0/?utm_term=.3cc7f6f89837) **near the top on a test that billed itself as a “Mega I.Q.” test, intended to distinguish who are the smartest among geniuses. Following his governorship, he was White House Chief of Staff, and is something of an elder statesman to the GOP.**

*John H. Sununu: And I’m pleased to be amongst this very distinguished gathering of experts who have come to make sure that the world knows that the debate on the science is not over...*

**Annie Ropeik: As Chief of Staff, John H. took a special interest in the subject of global warming.**

*John H. Sununu: … but the anti-growth and anti-development crowd are a very hardy bunch they won’t give up.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: John H. gave this speech at a conference for the Heartland Institute, a think tank that has focused on trying to rebut mainstream climate science.**

**Annie Ropeik: In this speech, Sununu lays out his theory of the origins of global warming.**

*John H. Sununu: My message today is to make sure we recognize that no matter how effectively we deal with exposing the errors and games behind that agenda, we need to know that the battle will never end, because the issue is not really global warming. This global warming crisis is just the latest surrogate for an overarching agenda of anti-growth, and anti-development that grew and gathered support in the years after World War II.*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: Global warming, John H. argues, is a Trojan Horse… carrying within its belly the real objective: massive reform to the capitalist system, socialism, and the scaling back of economic growth.**

*John H. Sununu: One of the first issues to be celebrated as a crisis by these reformers, was overpopulation. That fad peaked in the sixties and seventies. The bible of that cult — The Population Bomb — argued that the battle to feed all of humanity is over. And it claimed we had lost the battle, predicting that in the 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of millions of people would starve to death. That clearly phoney crisis was followed by warnings of global climate change.*

**Annie Ropeik: He argues that the primary tool of these plotters is computer models. In 1972 a group called the the Club of Rome used a computer model to argue the world would soon face resource scarcity, food shortages, and economic collapse by the end of the 1990s — all of which failed to materialize.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: John H. Sununu argues that similarly climate researchers have cooked the books… used the models to achieve a predetermined outcome.**

*John H. Sununu: The cast of characters involved in this has expanded a bit, but at their core there is an unbroken lineage back to those unbelievably wrong, unscientific prognosticators.*

**Annie Ropeik: The speech we’re hearing is from 2013… and maybe you’ve heard arguments like this. Perhaps even recently.**

*Tucker Carlson: the expense of this would be absolutely tremendous, there’s no way to I think even comprehend how much implementing this would cost.*

*Joe Bastardi: Well, first of all H.L. Menken who was a Democrat, said it correctly, the urge to save humanity is always a false face for the urge to rule it.*

*Justin Haskins: This is really about socialism. This is nothing more than a socialist Trojan horse. That’s why they’ve inserted all sorts of ideas into the Green New Deal that have nothing to do with green energy… [fades down]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: But John H. Sununu has been making this argument since the 1980s; well before global warming became politicized and intractable. Back when there was 20 percent less carbon in the atmosphere, and when there was more time to transition to a lower emissions society.**

*Nathaniel Rich: What’s interesting about Sununu to me is he developed this whole skepticism and all these objections on his own. And yet now they have become — in various forms — the main talking points of the right and climate denialists. But I think he came at them independently. So in some ways he’s a kind of prime mover there.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is author Nathaniel Rich. In the 1980s there was a growing momentum to address climate change — momentum that ultimately fizzled out. This was the moment where history could have swerved in a very different direction. Rich first wrote a detailed account of this period in an article called** [***Losing Earth***](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/01/magazine/climate-change-losing-earth.html) **— but an** [**expanded book-version**](https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374191337) **is due out next month. It’s a tale that prominently features John H. Sununu.**

*Nathaniel Rich: Now if you look at it — if you just came to him cold — you’d just say, oh he’s just one of the rest of them. But no I think that actually — strangely — this sort of… these crank theories have become the central tenets of Republicanism.*

[Outside/In theme music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: Today on Outside/In, a family that has been on the front lines of climate change politics since the very beginning. I’m Sam Evans-Brown.**

**Annie Ropeik: The Sununus are perhaps the most powerful family in the history of New Hampshire politics. They’ve been governors, a senator, a congressman, and even a White House chief of staff.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Today we’re going to track this one political dynasty, and with it, mainstream Republican thought on climate change: where’s it been, where it is now, and maybe where it’s going.**

[Outside/In theme music fades]

*Richard Nixon: Clean air and clean water. The wise use of our land. The protection of wildlife and natural beauty. These are part of the birthright of every American.*

**Annie Ropeik: A thing to keep in mind: a huge number of our foundational environmental laws — the creation of the EPA, the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts, the Toxic Substances Control Act… and many more — were passed in the 1970s under Richard Nixon.**

*Richard Nixon: To Guarantee that birthright, we must act, and act decisively. It is literally now or never.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: At this point, environmental issues had strong bipartisan support, and Republicans wanted to be sure that they didn’t cede this ground to the Democrats.**

*Ronald Reagan: I believe in a sound, strong environmental policy that protects the health of our people and the wise stewardship of our nation's natural resources, but that’s enough about me.*

[Music]

**Annie Ropeik: But less than a decade later, under Ronald Reagan, the backlash to the environmental movement grew. He put administrators in charge of the EPA and Department of Interior who worked to roll back Nixon-era policies and open up previously protected land.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: His EPA administrator, Anne Gorsuch, who also happens to be Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch’s mother, cut the EPA’s budget by more than twenty percent, and when lawmakers accused her of mismanaging Superfund dollars, she wound up being held in contempt of Congress.**

**Annie Ropeik: Reagan’s interior secretary, James Watt, increased the acreage of land the federal government leased for coal mining by around five times.**

*Ronald Reagan: The secretary of interior, Jim Watt, is the prime target of those who claim that this administration is out to level the forest and cover the country with black tops. Someone in the press the other day said if Jim discovered a cure for cancer, there are those who would attack him for being pro-life.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: These figures were not popular. Environmental groups fundraised and rallied against them, and they were pushed out.**

[Music Fades]

**Annie Ropeik: And so in 1988, when George HW Bush ran for president, he positioned himself to regain the trust of environmental community**

*George HW Bush: We all know that human activities are changing the atmosphere in unexpected and unprecedented ways. Much remains to be done.*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: By this time, global warming was already a high profile public issue. The first official government summary of climate science** [**was finished in 1979**](https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19856/carbon-dioxide-and-climate-a-scientific-assessment)**. Two more landed** [**within a week**](https://www.nytimes.com/1983/10/21/us/haste-of-global-warming-trend-opposed.html) **of each other in 1983 and were covered by newspapers and TV news.**

**Annie Ropeik: James Hansen, a NASA scientist who wrote one of the first computer models of the greenhouse effect, first testified before Congress on the issue back in 1982. Articles about his research had already been front-page news in the New York Times.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: So it should come as no surprise that this was an issue that Bush was talking about as a presidential candidate.**

*Rafe Pomerance: What’s particularly noteworthy to me that I remember was the one-liner on Climate Change where Bush stated that those who are worried about the greenhouse effect are ignoring the Whitehouse effect. So he was making a very clear commitment on the issue.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is Rafe Pomerance, an environmental activist who has worked for Friends of the Earth, the World Resources Institute, the State department and a hodgepodge of other campaigns and organizations.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In the early eighties he spent years putting global warming on the national stage by personally arranging meetings between lawmakers and a prominent government climate scientist.**

**Annie Ropeik: By the time the nineties rolled around, Rafe had already seen more than one climate change hype cycle wax and wane with no real action.**

*Rafe Pomerance: So you’re right that there were Republicans who were taking the issue seriously. Now these were liberal Republicans, but I would say on the whole the Republican party was much more moderate and open at that stage.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: So that’s the political vibe of 1980s. Some Republicans are prioritizing business over conservation - but you still had a Republican running for the Oval Office explicitly claiming that he would be the “**[**environmental president**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-energy-202/2018/12/04/the-energy-202-how-george-h-w-bush-helped-turn-acid-rain-into-a-problem-of-yesteryear/5c0590001b326b60d12800f2/?utm_term=.364e745bbdad)**.”**

**Annie Ropeik: It’s here that we turn our attention to John H. Sununu. At first he was an engineering professor at Tufts, but decided he wanted to put his smarts to work serving his community. He won a seat to the local planning board and later in New Hampshire’s 400-member, House of Representatives.**

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: He lost four elections — twice for the state senate, the governor’s council, and finally the Republican primary to be New Hampshire’s US senator — but in 1982, he won the governor’s office.**

**Annie Ropeik: And like other Republicans of this era, he had dabbled in environmental protection.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In fact, Rafe Pomerance helped with an environmental campaign that caught John H.’s attention.**

*Rafe Pomerance: I was involved in a major campaign around Acid Rain at the time.*

*News Clip: Acid rain looks feels and smells like any other rain, but the water in acid rain carries poisons like sulfuric acid.*

*Rafe Pomerance: An enormous number —* [*over 100 towns*](https://www.nytimes.com/1983/03/10/us/acid-rain-assailed-in-new-hampshire.html) *at the annual town meeting approved resolutions calling for action on acid rain.*

**Annie Ropeik: That campaign organized a conference in Manchester, New Hampshire, and all of the Democratic candidates vying to be the nominee to challenge Reagan attended.**

[Music cuts out]

*Rafe Pomerance: But, curiously, or importantly, the Governor John Sununu, came to the conference, and uh my recollection is that ultimately Sununu was a supporter of acting on Acid rain.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: As Governor, John H. Sununu signed the nation’s first acid rain legislation,** [**requiring a 25% reduction on sulfur dioxide emissions in the state**](https://www.nytimes.com/1983/03/10/us/acid-rain-assailed-in-new-hampshire.html)**.**

**Annie Ropeik: So on environmental issues, it seemed that John H. and President Bush would be on the same page.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In the 1988 Presidential primary, Sununu threw his weight behind Bush’s candidacy. The bombastic governor's rhetorical force and connections helped Bush win—first in New Hampshire, and then his party's nomination.**

*John H. Sununu: We had a great candidate, a candidate who got his message out, a candidate who engaged certainly with his nearest rival, made it very clear what the difference was and what I think are the most discriminating voters in the country did a little comparison shopping, between the two of them decided George Bush was head and shoulders above ‘em.*

**Annie Ropeik: In thanks, after he won the White House, Bush appointed Sununu his chief of staff.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: It was in that powerful role that John H.** [**personally shepherded**](https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/john-h-sununu-oral-history-062000-white-house-chief) **a bill through Congress that set a gradually declining cap on pollution that causes acid rain, and allowed polluters to trade the right to emit.**

**Annie Ropeik: It was the model for the type of market-based solutions to climate change that we’re still debating today.**

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: All of this adds up to a situation in which it would seem that when it comes to global warming, George H W Bush, who had promised to deal with the issue on the campaign trail, and John H. Sununu, who had proven himself to be a pragmatic deal-maker on acid rain, would be simpatico… ready to get to work crafting some kind of conservative solution.**

**Annie Ropeik: And in fact, when Bush came to office, the table was set for them to do something big. Less than a year after Bush’s inauguration, world leaders planned a meeting — the first-ever international talks on a binding treaty to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The talks would be held in Noordwijk, in the Netherlands. This would be the ideal place for Bush to hold true to his promises of being an environmental president - to lead the world in addressing climate change.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But immediately it became clear that John H did not see global warming as being like acid rain. And this teed up an internal battle within the Bush administration.**

*Rafe Pomerance: and this became an issue inside the Bush Whitehouse and agencies... some people very enthusiastic about moving forward… others like Governor Sununu, Chief of Staff, was not.*

[Music fades out]

*Rafe Pomerance: And what happened was, during the crucial week when they were going to make a decision. Hansen again shows up.*

**Annie Ropeik: James Hansen is that NASA scientist, the one whose models of the greenhouse effect first got Congress’ attention back in the early 80s. He had continued coming before lawmakers, including now-famous bombshell testimony in 1988 when he declared that global warming was already being observed. Now, he was testifying again.**

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: But this time, John H. Sununu intervened.**

*Rafe Pomerance: And Hansen’s testimony was altered by the Bush administration. And later, as I have learned, Sununu claims he altered the testimony, and diminished its conclusions.*

**Annie Ropeik: The new text said that climate change might be attributable to “**[**natural processes**](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/01/magazine/climate-change-losing-earth.html)**,” which Hansen did not believe. This was leaked to the press, and was splashed all over the front page of the New York Times. The Bush White House wound up with egg all over their faces.**

*Rafe Pomerance: The Hansen alteration had a big political impact on the deliberations inside the Bush White house.…*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Rafe says when you look back at newspapers of the time, you see editorial writers throwing Bush's own words back at him. The self-proclaimed environmental president had promised his administration would tackle climate change. Instead, they'd been caught doing just the opposite — secretly trying to downplay the problem.**

**Annie Ropeik: It put the White House on the defensive. And for a moment in the roiling internal debate within the administration, it seemed like John H. Sununu had lost. Just before the historic, first-ever climate negotiations in the Netherlands began, he wrote a telegram to State Department’s negotiators,** [**reversing his previous position**](https://www.deseretnews.com/article/46250/US-REVERSES-ITSELF-BACKS-TALKS-ON-GLOBAL-WARMING.html) **and telling them to work towards a “full international consensus.”**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Here again is Nathaniel Rich, the author of *Losing Earth*.**

*Nathaniel Rich: And then then the strangest detail of all is that there’s a series of talks on the eve of the trip in November,* [*at a Tony hotel in DC in front of international — or — investors in the American Stock Exchange*](http://outsideinradio.org/sununu-investors)*. Sununu — although he’s not there to speak about climate change necessarily, he’s just there in his capacity as powerful person within the Bush administration to talk about the economy — spends most of his talk on Noordwijk and on this idea of a treaty. And in fact comes out fairly forcefully — it’s a very strange thing to read — in favor of a global agreement. And he’s challenged at one point by an investor in the audience who says, “well isn’t this going to have some major economic costs? And he says, “yeah there’ll be some up front costs, but it’s nothing compared to the back end costs if we don’t do anything.”*

**Annie Ropeik: And yet, despite all of this — despite having lost face by altering Hansen’s testimony and having been pressured into supporting a global greenhouse gas treaty — somewhere between that speech to investors and the final negotiation in Noordwijk, Sununu flipped again.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: It meant Americans began the talks with a hard-line stance.**

*Nathaniel Rich: We won’t sign anything that's binding in terms of emissions reductions, and we won't take part in anything that won’t consider the economic implications in the short-term basically. And that’s the end of the dream of a global binding treaty essentially. That’s the closest we’ve ever come since.*

[Music]

**Annie Ropeik: This set the template for all climate talks that followed, every subsequent attempt at a binding greenhouse gas reduction treaty has failed. Even the much lauded Paris agreement, which the US also backed out of, was completely non-binding…**

*Sam Evans-Brown: This is where we get this great quote, which I think is the Swedish environment minister walking out of the room, and saying “your government is fucking this up.”*

*Nathaniel Rich: Yeah, right. And they did.*

**Annie Ropeik: If that binding treaty had been signed in 1990 — and if global community had lived up to it — there could have been fifteen percent less carbon in the atmosphere when the effort to scale back emissions began. There would have been a thirty year head start on developing solutions and driving down their cost.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In short, the problem would have been a lot easier to solve.**

*Nathaniel Rich: Sununu today would say well we were just being the only honest broker. All these other governments were full of it, and had no intention of living up to any kind of treaty, binding or not.*

[Music fades out]

**Annie Ropeik: This was not the end of John H. Sununu’s legacy with regards to global warming.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: He** [**resigned from the Bush Whitehouse in 1991**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/04/sununu-resigns/20f1af68-a986-4240-b7de-2f1f6c6625a5/?utm_term=.9bf691c11dd9) **after he was found to be using military planes for personal trips, and** [**taking a white house limousine to a stamp auction**](https://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/17/us/sununu-went-to-stamp-auction-in-us-car.html)**. But just a few months later,** [**he got a job as one of the regular hosts of the TV show Crossfire**](https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/05/news/review-television-sununu-joins-crossfire-opinion-program.html)**.**

*Crossfire: Live from Washington, Crossfire. On the left, Mike Kinsley. On the right, John Sununu*

**Annie Ropeik: For Jerry Taylor, it was an ideal situation.**

*Jerry Taylor: Yeah, I left college in 1986, I didn’t graduate, I wanted to get into politics.*

**Annie Ropeik: Jerry was a prominent climate change skeptic at the time that he was a regular guest on Crossfire. He used to work for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank that also traffics minority viewpoints on climate science.**

*Jerry Taylor: I was one of the nation’s leading gunslingers promoting climate skepticism.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Jerry has since left the church of climate skepticism and now is the president of the Niskanen Center, which works to promote conservative solutions to global warming.**

**Annie Ropeik: But back when he was on the other end of the spectrum, he was a frequent guest on Crossfire. This was a political TV show that the New York Times described as “a weeknightly half-hour of aggressively expressed, uncomplicated opinions delivered in a spirit of absolute certitude.”**

*John H. Sununu on Crossfire: Easy sex, daily sex, frequent sex, what phrase do you want me to use?*

*Jerry Taylor: They generally have a script where you have a person on the right who argues very strongly for non-action and then you’d have a person on the environmental community on the left arguing for action, and producers were there to book the most telegenic and glib and entertaining people they could to take those two slots. And back in those days I was nothing if not glib and entertaining.*

[music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: Just like their guests, the Crossfire hosts — including John H. Sununu — were not expected to be neutral. And this was the nineties, it was the period during which** [**oil companies were beginning to launch a media campaign**](https://www.pulitzer.org/finalists/insideclimate-news) **designed at undermining the scientific underpinnings of global warming.**

**Annie Ropeik: The media pounced on those new talking points. Suddenly, the issue had two sides. and John H. Sununu was a perfect fit for the role of climate change skeptic.**

*Jerry Taylor: I mean he had just left the white House as chief of staff, so he still an important political player in Washington, and so it’s kind of a thrill to get a chance to hobnob with someone like that. And especially since John Sununu was someone who was steeped in climate knowledge and climate skepticism and he was no casual actor.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Through the nineties, think tanks began to sprout up, with their own self-proclaimed experts, like Jerry Taylor, who you could book for your talk show.**

**Annie Ropeik: Where-as previously, global warming journalism had meant writing about dry government reports and National Research Council summaries, now could be covered as talking heads shouting at each other…**

**Sam Evans-Brown: It was the beginning of a time in which the media shifted from covering climate change as a scientific certainty to something that was up for debate, and as a host of Crossfire, John H. was given a prominent voice in that debate.**

*Jerry Taylor: And so in these conversations, often I’d be in a debate, and in the course of the back and forth, Sununu would jump in and throw his own shots that were as capable as those I was putting on the table… so he was not disengaged, and he was not lightly informed.*

**Annie Ropeik: We couldn't find any old footage of Sununu talking about global warming on Crossfire, but other records show his main arguments** [**in this period**](https://infinitehistory.mit.edu/video/workshop-global-climate-change-john-deutch-john-sununu-guests-sloan-school-2141992) **were simple: the climate system is complex, and climate models are too simplistic, and the jury is still out on global warming.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: These are all talking points that at that time Jerry Taylor was also using. But unlike John H, as Jerry dug deeper into climate science, he became disillusioned with the arguments of climate skeptics.**

*Jerry Taylor: When I was on these programs and talking with governor Sununu, what we was putting on the table was no more enlightened than the kind of crack-pottery that I was marketing in, unknowingly at the time.*

[Music fades out]

**Annie Ropeik: John H. Sununu would hold onto his platform on Crossfire for six years. All the way up through 1998.**

*[John H. Sununu arguing on Crossfire]*

**Anie Ropeik: And then, he stepped out of the limelight. He began to take an interest in business… investing in all kinds of companies. He was on the board of a company drilling for oil in Southeast Africa, and even bought a 10% stake in an honest-to-goodness gold mine in** [**Azerbaijan**](https://www.nhpr.org/post/waterville-valley-gold-mine-sununu-family-interests-built-political-clout#stream/0)**.**

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: As John H. eased into the private sector, Republicans began flirting with new approach to the climate issue, just as new Sununu with his own views was rising into political prominence.**

*John E. Sununu: [fades up] ...I thought it was more important to get something done. To get a good bipartisan bill that raised those fuel efficiency standards… [fades down]*

**Annie Ropeik: After a quick break, the next generation takes the reins.**

[Music fades out]

[Ad Break]

**Annie Ropeik: [Blooper] There are a lot of Sununus… [laughter] New Sununus. Okay. There are a lot of Sununus. John H. Sununu and his — it is impossible to say that name multiple times in a row… frick! Oh my god.**

[Music]

**Annie Ropeik: There are a lot of Sununus. John H. Sununu and his wife Nancy had eight children.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Most aren’t public figures — or at least they keep a lower profile. Daughter Kathy runs a museum, son Pete works for a media company in Louisville, and son James works in the family business — which, it's worth noting, spans a lot of areas that are kind of adjacent to energy, and climate: oil, mining, water infrastructure, utilities… there's a lot going on.**

**Annie Ropeik: But some of those Sununus have gone on to use the family name and political connections to their advantage. In 1996, during the Clinton administration, John E. Sununu — that’s the son, not the father — was elected to his first term in the US House of Representatives for New Hampshire.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: If John H. Sununu was a prime-mover in shift in of the Republican party’s stance on global warming — an early voice for the abandonment of mainstream climate science in favor of the fringes that questioned the very foundation of atmospheric physics — how would his son approach climate?**

[music fades out]

*Laura Knoy: And start off senator Sununu with the energy bill… as you mentioned the energy bill passed after a very close fight in congress, my understanding was you initially opposed this bill.*

*John E. Sununu: No, not at all. What I opposed was the tax package.*

**Annie Ropeik: John E. served in the U.S. House of Representatives for three terms starting in 1997, and was the youngest member of Congress that whole time. He was seen as a rising star — a party darling — who, in 2002, was recruited to oust a Republican incumbent from the Senate that had been giving the party heartburn. He won.**

*John E. Sununu: This is a case where if you actually stand up for doing something that’s bipartisan than some partisan, in this case from the far left, is going to come at you and say… [fades down]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: While he was in office his voting record was** [**consistently conservative**](https://votesmart.org/candidate/evaluations/617/john-sununu#.XHfULIhKiM9)**. The times that he broke with the rest of his party were usually because he viewed their proposals as not adhering to Republican principles. He** [**joined a Democrat filibuster of the patriot act**](https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/10/politics/key-democratic-and-gop-senators-are-in-accord-on-extending-patriot.html) **because he believed it infringed on personal liberty...**

*John E. Sununu: We had to filibuster the bill, we had to stop it in its tracks in order to get those changes made, but they were were fighting for and I would fight for them again... [fades down]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: ...and he helped block an energy bill** [**calling it a “grab bag”**](https://web.archive.org/web/20160306115500/http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/21/politics/21CND-ENER.html) **for special interests that was too expensive.**

**Annie Ropeik: But toward the end of his time as a senator — thanks in part to the unpopularity of the war in Iraq — Republicans had lost their majorities in both the House and Senate.**

*Newscast: And good morning to you, it is a new day in America, the people have spoken, a seismic shift in the house of representatives… [fades down]*

**Annie Ropeik: And in this environment action on climate change experienced a brief moment of bipartisan support.**

*TV Ad: Hi I’m Nancy Pelosi, lifelong democrat and speaker of the house. And I’m Newt Gingrich, lifelong republican, and I used to be speaker. We don’t always see eye-to-eye, do we Newt? No, but we do agree, our country must take action to address climate change [fades down]*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: For years, Republican Senator McCain and Democrat Joe Lieberman had been pushing different versions of something called the “Climate Stewardship Act.”**

*John McCain on Senate floor: These are facts that cannot be refuted by any scientist or any union or any special interest that’s weighing in more heavily on this issue than any issue since we got into campaign finance reform. Mr. President, that’s the Arctic sea… that’s the Arctic sea and if you look at the red line, the boundary of it in 1979, look at it now. You can believe me, or your lyin’ eyes.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: This was a cap-and-trade bill… and market-based carbon reduction scheme based on the same model that John H. Sununu — that’s the father — had helped to get through Congress in order to deal with acid rain.**

[Music]

*Grant Bosse: In Senator Sununu’s case, he actually had an interest in climate bills.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is Grant Bosse.**

*Grant Bosse: I worked on energy and climate issues for Senator John E. Sununu from 2003 to 2008.*

**Annie Ropeik: Toward the end of John E.’s time in office…**

**Sam Evans-Brown: [interrupting]** **Remember that’s the son.**

**Annie Ropeik: ...Republicans were on their heels. and were looking at an unfavorable election map in 2008. And he had a tough opponent — the state’s, first-ever, female governor.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: So, despite being a rising conservative star, despite the name recognition his family enjoys, John E’s re-election was a real question.**

*Grant Bosse: So with Democrats holding the gavels, there was a lot more momentum to pass some kind of carbon bill. And when it looked like Congress was going to pass something, than you want to jump in you want to make that bill as productive as you can.*

**Annie Ropeik: Which is how it came to be that John E. Sununu — son of the man who who would go on to call climate science unbelievably wrong — prominently signed on to a carbon cap-and-trade bill. A collaboration with Delaware Democrat Tom Carper. The** [**Carper-Sununu plan.**](https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/senate-bill/1177?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22s+1177%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=1)

*Grant Bosse: Yeah, there were all sorts of bills that varied in scope and varied in their approach, some were more top-down. Bernie Sanders had a bill that was pretty much the federal government taking over the energy sector. McCain-Leiberman was a cap and trade bill, Carper-Sununu was actually multi-pollutant, so it had as much to do with air-quality. Sulfur nitrogen mercury… So because senator Sununu cared about it, I cared about it.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: So what did Sununu’s bill look like? It was a so-called Cap-and-Trade bill. Cap — as in it set a cap on economy-wide carbon emissions, and trade as in it allowed companies to buy and sell allowances to emit carbon, up to the cap.**

*Grant Bosse: So you’ve got a financial incentive to free up as much of those emissions as possible so you can sell the right to emit to somebody else.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is the same scheme as John H. Sununu, the father, designed to deal with acid rain. It's a market-driven solution — and Grant says John E. Sununu wanted to carry that idea forward on climate change in Congress.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But more the point, when you listen to John E. Sununu at the time, he supported a wide range of initiatives to deal with climate change. Here he is on New Hampshire Public Radio in 2008.**

*John E. Sununu: We got the bill done, it’s been signed into law and we can and should come back and look at that tax package because there are a lot of pieces in it that are very good. That I support. Tax credits for wind, renewable energy, for solar, for biomass, all of those are provisions I’ve supported in the past and will continue to support.*

*Laura Knoy: So just to make this crystal-clear Senator Sununu, the energy bill that was… [fades down]*

**Annie Ropeik: Let’s sum this up. John H. Sununu — the father — arguably was the most important single political actor opposing a binding global treaty to limit climate change.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But nearly twenty years later, John E. Sununu — the son — facing a tough reelection and a political landscape in which the most prominent Republican was championing a domestic carbon reduction bill, is putting forward his own climate bill and talking up tax credits for renewable energy.**

*Jerry Taylor: And so you saw a number of Republicans offering these ideas. Mainstream Republicans, even conservative republicans.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is Jerry Taylor again.**

*Jerry Taylor: Climate action is coming, best that we do it in a rational market-based fashion than in some scatter-shot regulatory jihad. So Senator Sununu was not an outlier in the GOP by any means even though there were conservatives in the GOP who opposed these ideas. Back at that time you could take this position without risking your political career with the Republican base.*

[music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: But the bipartisan efforts to pass an economy-wide cap-and-trade bill fizzled when McCain launched a bid for president and abandoned the idea. For a lot of critics of the GOP, this all prompts a question: were these mainstream Republicans like, John E. Sununu, sincere? And more broadly, are they ever sincere, when it comes to action on climate change or is this all posturing... what climate activists call "predatory delay."**

[music fades out]

*Sheridan Brown: You know I think with regard to climate there was a certain amount of avoidance.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is another former staffer for John E. Sununu, Sheridan Brown.**

*Sheridan Brown: There were things that he did that he could tout, a cap-and-trade bill toward the end when he was up for a tough reelection — but there didn’t seem to be a lot of interest.*

**Annie Ropeik: Unlike Grant Bosse — who while he says he’s very discouraged by the state of today’s politics, has stuck with the Republican party — Sheridan has become disillusioned with the right, and become a loud critic of the Sununu family.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: He’s now on the team that believes John E. was never serious about acting on climate.**

*Sheridan Brown: If you were truly believing that climate change existed and was caused by manmade emissions of carbon, you wouldn’t at the same time be pushing for more drilling in places like the Alaskan National Wildlife refuge. The two are just not in agreement.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Grant Bosse doesn’t buy this.**

*Grant Bosse: You had a bunch of people, Republicans and Democrats, who agreed that yeah, the earth is warming, human activity almost certainly has something to do with that , and it would probably be a good thing if we could do something about it and lower our carbon emissions in a way that didn’t cripple the economy.*

[Music]

*Sheridan Brown: I mean there was always a great emphasis on the fact that you were dealing with an engineer, but he wasn’t a climatologist. He was a mechanical engineer. Yet great weight was placed on: “here’s a bright guy, here’s an engineer who can think this through.”*

*Sam Evans-Brown: Um… it’s really funny that you say that because, that feels like a Sununu family trend.*

*Sheridan Brown: Yeah…*

[Music]

*Chris Sununu: uh, I’m an environmental engineer. I studied and worked in the environmental field for ten years, so this is something I know a lot about. Combine that with running a ski resort where we’re completely weather dependent.*

**Annie Ropeik: John E. lost his campaign for re-election to the Senate in 2008, washed out of office in the democratic wave triggered by Barack Obama’s election. But New Hampshire wouldn’t go long without a Sununu in the halls of power.**

*Chris Sununu: The earth has been slowly warming since the mid-1800s there’s no doubt about that, is it manmade or not, look one thing I do know nobody knows for sure.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Back in New Hampshire, another Sununu was making moves in the business world. Chris Sununu, the second youngest of the eight children, was put in charge of a very big family project. The Sununus worked with a group of investors to purchase Waterville Valley, a ski area in the heart of New Hampshire’s White Mountains. A move which if you’re concerned about climate change, might seem like a risky one. New Hampshire's winters are already getting warmer, and research says that's bad news for the ski industry.**

**Annie Ropeik: But so far, Waterville Valley has soldiered on. After the sale, Chris was made CEO of the resort, but the whole family got into lending their heft to promoting it.**

*Peter Sununu: Hey there this is Pete Sununu, with the Waterville Valley resort blizzard… [fades down]*

*John H. Sununu: It’s been very gratifying for the whole Sununu family…*

*Chris Sununu: We took it over, and we’re able to kind of reinvest those dollars right here in New Hampshire as opposed to… [fades down]*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: But even as he was managing the ski area — which included overseeing a major expansion of the trail network and adding new lifts — Chris Sununu was dipping his toes into politics. In 2010 he won a seat on the Executive Council, which is an office that’s very specific to New Hampshire… it’s a panel of five that share executive branch power with the governor.**

*Chris Pappas: What was interesting is that Chris Sununu was always opposed to the solar projects.*

**Annie Ropeik: This is another Chris — now congressman, Chris Pappas. He's a Democrat who served with Chris Sununu on the Executive Council, at a time when the five-member body was split 3-2, with Republicans in the majority.**

*Chris Pappas: We would have a discussion and sometimes get to an agreement on some of the other alternative sources of energy, but whenever it was a solar project. He was always leading the charge against it.*

**Annie Ropeik: A main job of the Executive Council is to approve state contracts... public money that’s already been set aside and just needs to be actually spent. One kind of contract that often comes before the panel is for renewable energy projects are hoping to receive grants from the state’s Renewable Energy Fund.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: When efforts to pass federal climate legislation faltered and fell apart in Obama’s first term, climate advocates shifted their attention to state-level policies and trying to get local renewable energy projects off the ground.**

**Annie Ropeik: Still today, that’s** [**where most of the policies**](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/climate/states-global-warming.html) **aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions are advancing.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Back then, I was New Hampshire Public Radio’s environment reporter, and when Chris Sununu was on the Executive Council getting one Republican councilor to flip and vote for them became the only way that a solar project could move forward.**

*Chris Pappas: You’re remembering that very correctly. And oftentimes, that’s how we’d tip the balance, just local folks weighing in, in support of a particular project. Getting to their councilor or other members of the council and saying “what’s the hold up here? We’re waiting on these dollars here to do something important for his community.”*

**Annie Ropeik: In his six years on the Executive Council, Chris Sununu never voted to give a state grant to a single commercial scale solar array.**

*Chris Pappas: My takeaway is that he’s skeptical of solar and the promise it holds.*

*Sam Evans-Brown: More than any other… more than wind... more than — you know — any other type of renewable generation?*

*Chris Pappas: That’s been my experience.*

[Music cuts out]

**Sam Evans-Brown: So from the beginning — from his investments in the ski industry, to his antagonism toward the solar industry — Chris Sununu hasn’t seemed very concerned about global warming.**

**Annie Ropeik: But his rhetoric on the subject has shifted. In 2016, after three terms on the Executive Council, Chris Sununu won the governor’s office. This is how he talked about climate change, when he was running in a competitive Republican primary.**

*Chris Sununu: Nobody knows absolutely one way or the other whether it’s manmade or not. We have to be smart, and with myself in the governor’s office, we have the opportunity to be smart, we have the opportunity to have a governor that understands these issues… [fades down]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Now here he is, two years later, when he was running for reelection, and had to worry less about turning out the Republican base.**

*Chris Sununu: Let’s be very clear. Humans have contributed to climate change, that is not a question contrary to what my opponent may say. I’m the only candidate on this stage who has fought to lower electric rates.*

**Annie Ropeik: And here he is live on New Hampshire Public Radio, late last year.**

*Laura Knoy: Two more quickies on this so do you now agree, Governor Sununu, with the consensus that man-made emissions are responsible for the temperature rises that we’re seeing.*

*Chris Sununu: Look man-made emissions have a part to play in climate change. Yes. Fact. Done. Let’s move on. Right? What do we — to your original question — what are we going to do about that?*

*Laura Knoy: Right What do you do about that?*

*Chris Sununu: What are we going to do about it? Right. And that’s where my focus is, in terms of what is an appropriate not just role but position to be in terms of making sure that we’re being responsible. We’re helping the environment. We’re looking at the social impacts. And again we’re just in a tougher place than a lot of other states when it comes to the economic impact because we’re already so burdened with these incredibly high electric rates.*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: What’s going on here? If John H. Sununu was a prime mover: a Republican who began to question climate science before that was the safe obvious political bet for Republicans to make.**

**Annie Ropeik: And if John E. Sununu was in office at a time where Republicans felt it was necessary to at least put forth some sort of proposal for how to mitigate climate change.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: What does Chris Sununu represent? You might be able to tell that it's hard to pin him down. He's not the only Republican who has to hedge on climate change these days — it's just not a winning issue with their base... even as the pro-business crowd sees economic opportunity in finding solutions.**

**Annie Ropeik: No matter what Chris Sununu believes, personally, about global warming, he’s working within a Republican party at war with itself. It's no longer his older brother's GOP, which could get away with taking climate change seriously, talking about policy solutions. It's the GOP of 2019.**

*Jerry Taylor: You can see a very clear dividing line in the party between pre-tea party and post-tea party.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Again, Jerry Taylor, of the Niskanen Center.**

*Jerry Taylor: Pre Tea Party, you could be a Republican, even a staunch conservative like Senator Sununu, and argue that we have to do something about climate change and you were not jeopardizing your career in a primary challenge or anything of the kind. Nor were you symbolically speaking putting on a Che Guevara t-shirt by making that argument. Nobody’s going to question your conservative bonafides — they may disagree with you on the issue, but after all atmospheric physics is not ideological and there’s room for disagreement about this within the Republican party. But after 2010 that changed. Or excuse me after 2008 and that election… taking a realistic position on climate became an absolute kiss of death.*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: When asked about climate, Chris Sununu doesn’t have much to say. He rarely acknowledges the effect that rising seas will have on parts of New Hampshire's small but economically important coast…**

**Annie Ropeik: ...or that warming winters will have on the just-as-important ski industry, which his family still has ties to.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: When climate change comes up, he tends to pivot to energy and business. He says New Hampshire’s electric rates — which are some of the highest in the country — are too high, and he’s been in favor of bills that lower those rates, and has vetoed bills that he says would raise them.**

**Annie Ropeik: In one case,** [**he vetoed pro-solar legislation**](https://www.nhpr.org/post/legislators-narrowly-override-sununus-biomass-veto-fall-short-net-metering) **that passed on a bipartisan vote in a Republican dominated legislature. Now that the Democrats have the majority, this same bill is getting even more support, but Sununu is still threatening another veto. His budget proposal for the next two years would also pull money from the state's Renewable Energy Fund, the one that supports those solar projects he used to vote against.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: In other words, even as his language shifts, his policy priorities don’t.**

[Music fades out]

**Annie Ropeik: But while Chris Sununu, in his role as governor, has thus far been cagey on climate change, there’s one there’s one more Sununu you should know about, one who has been much more plain spoken.**

*Sam Evans-Brown: So it’s pretty easy to google your name and find articles that say you’re a climate denier.*

*Michael Sununu: [laughing] Sure!*

*Sam Evans-Brown: But it sounds like you’re not questioning the idea that carbon dioxide warms the atmosphere.*

*Michael Sununu: Let’s talk about what that means, a climate denier. Is the world warming up? Absolutely. I don’t think there’s any question, and for the most part, most of the pieces I publish, one of the first things I acknowledge is the world has been warming since the mid-1800s.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: This is Chris’ older brother, Michael Sununu. He’s not a climate scientist, and he's never been governor or senator. But he has made himself something of a public figure, largely by** [**writing editorials about climate science**](https://www.nhpr.org/post/michael-sununu-brother-governor-takes-aim-climate-science-state-report#stream/0)**.**

**Annie Ropeik: By the way, we reached out multiple times, via phone messages and emails to all of the Sununus who’ve taken a public stance in the climate change debate — John H., John E., Chris — Michael was the only one who agreed to sit down and be interviewed.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: Remember how Chris has used rhetorical contortions to never quite say exactly what he thinks about climate change? That’s what an ambitious elected Republican in a New Hampshire needs to satisfy both the conservative base and the general voting public.**

**Annie Ropeik: While the numbers have ticked up slightly in the last year,** [**only 25 to 30 percent**](http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/a-growing-majority-of-americans-think-global-warming-is-happening-and-are-worried/) **of conservative Republicans say they are worried about climate change. That’s compared to more than fifty percent of Republicans more broadly, and nearly 70 percent of independents. That’s a wide gulf… and a real conundrum for a purple state Republican.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But Michael can speak his mind. His views on global warming are well outside the scientific mainstream. He isn’t sure that the observed increase in carbon dioxide is driven by human activities, versus natural processes; he isn’t sure that CO2 increases drive warming, versus the other way around; and he even questions the fundamental principle of the greenhouse effect, the degree to which CO2 molecules effectively absorb heat compared to the role of water vapor in the atmosphere.**

*Sam Evans-Brown: So I’m not a climate scientist obviously, I’m a —*

*Michael Sununu: nor am I!*

*Sam Evans-Brown: But I do know I could call — again after very cursory googling — any number of dozens of climate scientists who would tell me that you’re wrong about just about everything that you just said. And I’m curious how you respond to that, the fact that it would be very easy to produce climate scientists who would reject a lot of your assertions.*

*Michael Sununu: Well I think you have to ask, is really, what are they basing that rejection on? Are they basing it on a model form of our climate, which most of those rejections will — that’s their foundation. Which I would say is… models are not science, so to speak.*

[Music]

**Annie Ropeik: Here, the connection back to his father’s views is quite clear. Like John H. Sununu, Michael says that the assumptions and simplifications made by climate modelers make their conclusions unreliable. This is despite the fact that historic climate models have, to date,** [**done a pretty good job**](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WG1AR5_Chapter09_FINAL.pdf) **forecasting today’s measured temperatures.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But if John H. Sununu was personally digging into the assumptions made by climate modelers and picking them apart. And John E. and Chris Sununu choose their talking points on global warming based on the political calculations of their individual moment.**

**Annie Ropeik: Michael Sununus views are somewhat different. He hasn’t had to create them whole-cloth. When you ask him about his influences, he points to a few...**

*Michael Sununu: His name is Joe D’Aleo, he’s from New Hampshire. Um, he was actually one of the founders of the weather channel.*

*Michael Sununu: You mentioned Richard Lindzen, probably nobody has ever heard of him.*

*Michael Sununu: I think Roy Spencer...*

*Michael Sununu: Judith Curry ... eminent climate scientist.*

*Michael Sununu: There are voices out there, and good voices that talk about the science...*

**Sam Evans-Brown: These figures that Michael cites are the whos who of prominent climate change skeptics. They are scientists, and some like Judith Curry, are actually cited by the United Nations body that evaluates climate science: the IPCC. They’re still mainstream… though their studies are the outliers… forecasting much less dire climate change than the rest of the scientific community.**

[Music fades out]

**Annie Ropeik: When you read climate skeptic blogs, these are some of the maybe two dozen names that come up over and over in attempts to discredit the IPCC.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: They’re names that are very familiar to Jerry Taylor — the former “gunslinger” we’ve been hearing throughout this story. In 2016, Jerry was invited to New Hampshire to give a presentation at the University of New Hampshire. While he was in town, he was asked to brief the president of a local right wing think tank on climate change over coffee.**

*Jerry Taylor: We arrive for coffee and to our surprise, there was Michael Sununu, we didn’t expect to see Michael there, we didn’t know he was going to be part of the meeting, but that’s fine, uh… he’s an important guy.*

**Annie Ropeik: The president of the Institute had asked Michael Sununu to come along… in Jerry’s words, as a kind of climate consigliere.**

*Jerry Taylor: And so we had some coffee and started this conversation, it became clear that Michael Sununu had downloaded just about everything out of the right wing think world or that ever showed up on Fox News, the Wall Street Journal, or Breitbart or Rush Limbaugh. And he was primed for bear, just like his father was, back in the day.*

[Music]

*Jerry Taylor: I don’t believe that Michael Sununu had any doubts that the case for climate action was, as he would put it, a cooked up bunch of nonsense that can’t withstand even a casual examination. And he was going to demonstrate that to me. And so he was off the races, and I finally stopped him and I said, Michael, I don’t know if you know this but I wrote all that crap twenty years ago. I know this story. I know this evidence. I know these studies your offering. I know these arguments, intimately. I was paid to promote them 24/7. Let me tell you what’s wrong with them, or at least why it was that I began to doubt them. But he would have none of it.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Michael says he does consulting work for telecommunications clients, and says he’s worked on water development projects in the caribbean and Southeast Africa, and helps manage Waterville Valley, the ski area that the family owns and runs. He was briefly involved with** [**an aborted plan**](https://content.sierraclub.org/coal/environmentallaw/plant/loraxag) **to develop** [**a coal-fired fertilizer plant**](https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/blog/mass-high-tech/2009/11/loraxag-lines-up-45m-for-clean-coal-gas-plant.html) **in the Midwest.**

**Annie Ropeik: As he says, he’s not a climate scientist, but when many prominent New Hampshire Republicans have questions about climate science, it’s Michael Sununu, not Jerry Taylor, who they turn to.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: He presents on climate somewhat regularly at the New Hampshire Business and Industry Association’s annual conference.**

*Sam Evans-Brown: Do you think that since you’ve taken on this mantel of talking about this that your views have gotten traction here in New Hampshire?*

*Micheal Sununu: No [laughs] I don’t. And it’s unfortunate because as I said I think there’s this overwhelming public perception, that sometimes I feel like Sifeeus [sic] rolling that boulder up the hill.*

*Sam Evans-Brown: So even with things like getting invited to the BIA — to present to the BIA — which is a forum of fairly powerful folks… there’s lawmakers in that room — you don’t think your message has landed?*

*Michael Sununu: No… I’m not sure… it’s always hard to tell. I guess to some extent. I guess I’ll know the message has landed when I see somebody here in New Hampshire get up and say, you know I was on the other side of the climate debate but these questions really, that he raises, actually had some validity.*

*Sam Evans-Brown: You want to change minds*

*Michael Sununu: I want them to ask the questions.*

[Music fades out]

**Annie Ropeik: But even though he’s invited to address lawmakers and business leaders… even though he advocates for and against energy bills at the New Hampshire statehouse, leveraging his last name… even though he’s an advisor to** [**a energy group**](http://www.neratepayers.org/) **that has close ties to the governor… even though the governor is his brother — Michael doesn’t believe his opinions on climate change matter more than any other Joe Citizen’s.**

*Sam Evans-Brown: So you don’t feel… for instance that… I mean do you get face-time with your brother, that he’s listening to you?*

*Michael Sununu: Oh no. Oh no. I’m sure there are a lot of listeners out there who feel that the Sununu family gets together at dinner every week and figures out what we’re doing.*

*Sam Evans-Brown: All ten of you…*

*Michael Sununu: Oh no… it is not. And I avoid talking to my brother about these policy issues. One for his sake because I don’t think he really cares to hear me complain about what he’s doing or he certainly doesn’t need me to support the good things he’s doing. Certainly for his sake and for my sake as well. The issue is not… is not… my family.*

[Music]

**Sam Evans-Brown: The truth is… Michael Sununu might not need any special access in order for his ideas to hold sway. He might just need to be there, putting out these ideas, so that other Republicans can take them and run with them.**

**Annie Ropeik: Certainly he doesn’t have to try hard to convince a lot of Republicans they don’t need to put forth any sort of plan for taking action on climate change.**

*Jerry Taylor: One thing the climate skeptics and denialists have done very well is they have made skepticism and denialism about climate science a core part of republican identity. And that means a lot more to people than being “right” about an issue.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Times have changed, but the Sununu family is still very much tapped in to climate change and energy politics in New Hampshire. Michael testifies against carbon taxes at the statehouse… Chris vetoes any law that increases electric rates… and their father, John H. — the former *Crossfire* knife-fighter — has been to known to poke his head back into the issue, too.**

*[Cell phone video] John H. Sununu: I see you violated your own rule and made a comment instead of a question, and I'll make a comment now…*

**Annie Ropeik: That's the elder Sununu late last year in a ritzy banquet hall with views of New Hampshire's Atlantic coast. He was at a conference that** [**sparked controversy locally**](https://www.nhpr.org/post/climate-change-skeptics-will-debate-policy-portsmouth) **because it had a lot of speakers who have become synonymous with climate change denial and not so many on the other end of the spectrum.**

**Sam Evans-Brown: But the speakers who were skeptical that we should be worried about climate change had a fan in John H. Sununu.**

*[Cell phone video] John H. Sununu: … and somebody ought to be telling those folks that if they think they are helping their cause they are out of their mind. And I have no question. [laughter and applause]*

[Music fades out]

**Annie Ropeik; So where does this leave us? Of course, it’s anyone’s guess. If you had asked Rafe Pomerance, the climate activist who watched John H. Sununu torpedo the first climate talks in Noordwijk in 1989, he wouldn’t have guessed that we’d see the questioning of climate science that we’ve weathered over the past three decades.**

*Rafe Pomerance: The easy part was the science, you put more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere… the earth warms up… who can argue with this. I was totally wrong, right? So, I thought, the science was straightforward, the stakes were enormous, that there would be a response. I didn’t predict the divisions — or think that the divisions that we’re experiencing now would happen.*

**Sam Evans-Brown: But if anyone’s got an idea, it’s going to be someone who spends a lot of time talking to Republicans. Someone like Jerry Taylor, of the Niskanen Center.**

*Jerry Taylor: Right now, most elected — I would say most elected Republicans are not the sort of blind denialists that would seem to inhabit the White House. Now that doesn’t mean that they’re ready to ambitiously act, but their minds are open. … One of the thi — The only common denominator from the time of lincoln to the time of trump, and there is only one common denominator, is that it’s always been the party of business. Always. And as climate change becomes more and more of a problem, it’s going to cause more and more losses to businesses. To ski resorts to fishermen, to the ag industry, to various different resource industries, and to the recreation industry… to a number of them. What do you think the chances are that they will just quietly accept those losses versus perhaps launching legal action versus the fossil fuel companies that manufactured the products that gave them these losses. We’re already starting to see those kinds of lawsuits. We’ve seen them from the municipal level but we just recently saw them from the fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest, and we’re going to start seeing them more frequently from the ski industry and others. So that’s one thing that could change the way Republicans think about climate change. What if their favored industrial allies are the ones who are increasingly animated about recovering the damages that have been done to them?*

[Music]

**Annie Ropeik: It does feel like global warming is having something of a political moment, right now.**

*Cory Booker: We have to deal with this...*

**Sam Evans-Brown: It's a top issue for Democrats on the 2020 presidential campaign trail.**

*Cory Booker: … our planet is in peril*

**Annie Ropeik: Moderate republican governors like Larry Hogan and Charlie Baker are acting on climate at the state level.**

*Larry Hogan: We have tougher clean air standards… [fades down]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: Progressive democrats have put their weight behind at least the framework of the Green New Deal.**

*Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: Climate change and our environmental challenges are one of the biggest existential threats… [fades down]*

**Annie Ropeik: In response, a group of Republicans including Mitt Romney, Lindsey Graham and Lamar Alexander have a counter proposal, they’re calling “A New Manhattan Project for Clean Energy.”**

*Lamar Alexander: [fades up] ...clean up our air raise family incomes… [fades down]*

**Sam Evans-Brown: This fall, after a year of fires, floods and devastating hurricanes all potentially linked to the warming trend, opinion polls registered the first real uptick in concern about climate change for the first time in more than a decade.**

**Annie Ropeik: But we've been in these moments before, and If history is any judge, there will be Sununus in the room who decide where we go from here.**

[Outside/In theme music]

**CREDITS**

**This episode of Outside/In was produced by me Sam Evans-Brown, Annie Ropeik and Taylor Quimby, with help from Daniel Barrick, Cori Princell, Josh Rogers, Nick Capodice, Jimmy Gutierrez and Justine Paradis.**

**Erika Janik is our executive producer. Maureen McMurray is director of dynastic succession planning.**

**If you’re interested in hearing more about this story, we’re trying something new! You can find full, unedited versions of several of the interviews we used to put this story together — including the one with Jerry Taylor, Michael Sununu, Sheridan Brown and Grant Bosse — on our website, outsideinradio dot org.**

**If you want to weigh in, find us on Facebook, search for Outside/In and ask to join our moderated group. Or just shout at us on twitter, we’re @outsideinradio, I’m @aropeik and Sam is @SamEBNHPR.**

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