

To: Interested Parties
From: Jill Normington
Date: September 13, 2019
RE: NC-09 and the Clean Energy Industry

The following is a summary of findings from an online survey conducted among 423 likely special election voters in North Carolina's 9th Congressional District. Respondents were recruited from an online panel and interviewed online. Interviews were conducted August 27- September 2, 2019. The sampling error for this survey is plus or minus 4.8 percentage points. The data were weighted to reflect the final two-point vote margin favoring Bishop. Party Registration is 37% Democrat, 25% Independent and 38% Republican. Donald Trump won NC-09 54% to 42% in 2018 while winning North Carolina 50% to 46%.

Democrat Dan McCreehy lost narrowly to Republican Dan Bishop in the open seat special election in North Carolina's Ninth Congressional district. Even in a seat that Donald Trump won by 12 points in 2016, Republican outside groups aggressively targeted McCreehy often using his clean energy business as the vehicle for attack.

In an attempt to understand how solar policy and clean energy played with voters during the heat of the election, we surveyed NC-09 voters in Week 2 (two weeks to go until Election Day) when the candidates and outside groups had already accumulated more than 52,000 TV gross ratings points across the four media markets. Democrat Dan McCreehy is a solar energy entrepreneur who promoted his own record on clean energy and was attacked by Republican groups on that topic using numerous images of solar panels. NC-09 is one of the toughest battleground districts in the nation (R+12) and it presented an unusual opportunity to glean insight into the electoral salience of messages around clean energy, and solar in particular in a district where conservatives outnumber liberals 40% to 21%.

NC-09 voters have overwhelmingly favorable impressions of the solar industry (70%-22% favorable rating). Most believe that moving North Carolina to clean energy sources like wind and solar will create jobs (53%) rather than cost jobs (18%) and are more likely to think it will lower utility prices (40%) than raise them (27%). These pre-existing attitudes are assets that could be helpful to candidates everywhere. **Solar should understand the strength of its brand and candidates should feel confident about embracing it.**

The survey showed voters both an ad illustrating the attacks on solar paid for by the National Republican Campaign Committee (see Figure 1 below) that prominently featured solar panels and used McCreehy's business against him as well as an ad from the McCreehy campaign brushing aside the charges conspicuously displaying solar panels.

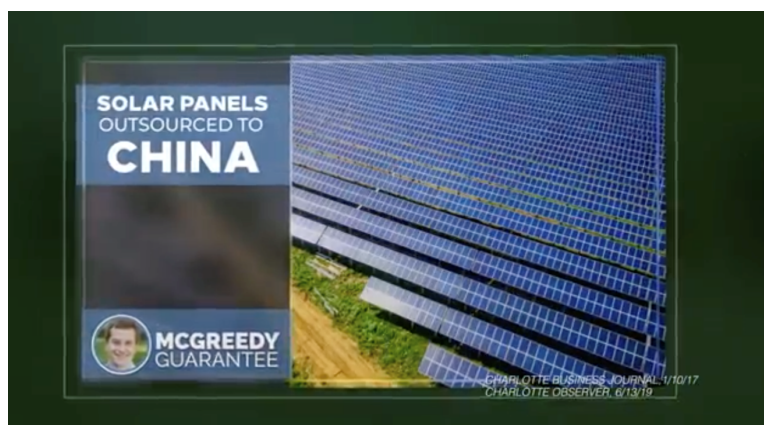


Figure 1. Screenshot from NRCC Ad Targeting McCreehy

Voters found the attack to be mostly believable (47%), thought it provided them with important information (48%) and, in a vacuum, it damaged McCreehy. A plurality (45%) had a less favorable impression of him and the race shifted a net 4 points away from McCreehy. McCreehy went from trailing Republican Dan Bishop 44% to 46% to trailing 40% to 46%.

However, McCreehy's rebuttal completely altered the equation. His response ad displayed solar panels prominently and at multiple points in the spot (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Screenshot from McCready Rebuttal Ad

Voters found his rebuttal to be believable (56%), important (54%) and shifted the race decisively towards McCready. He not only gained back the ground he lost to Bishop, but pulled him into a decisive lead (see Table 1). It should be noted that these ads actually aired in most media markets but just 56% said they saw the NRCC attack and 62% stated they saw the rebuttal from McCready.

	Overall	Dem	Ind	GOP
Initial				
McCready	44	81	43	8
Bishop	46	9	41	86
After NRCC Attack				
McCready	40	72	39	8
Bishop	46	9	43	84
After McCready Rebuttal				
McCready	47	82	44	14
Bishop	42	7	42	77

After the rebuttal, clean energy holds its ground. Just as many continue to think it creates jobs (53%) although after the back and forth fewer think it will lower utility prices (36%, was 40%).

What is abundantly clear from these data is that GOP attack ads are using solar energy imagery and those attacks can be effective. The sense that clean energy might raise utility prices is likely to be repeated in future advertising, given the outcome of the race

These data suggest that McCready's solar background helped him keep this race competitive, even though he could not overcome the 12-point GOP advantage in this decidedly Trump district. Clean energy, and solar in particular, have a strong story to tell. Clean energy supporters and the candidates themselves should be aggressive about telling that story to voters.