

MEMO

To: Interested Parties

From: Navin Nayak, SVP for Campaigns at LCV

Re: In Virginia, the Politics of Energy & Climate Change Have Changed

Date: Monday, November 4, 2013

The politics of energy and climate change have fundamentally shifted in Virginia. This continues a national trend that started in 2012, and previews how energy issues will play in the 2014 electoral landscape.

In 2012, despite tens of millions of dollars spent by the fossil fuel industry, not a single senator who supported the EPA's climate regulations lost their race. Not in Ohio, Pennsylvania, or Montana. In Virginia, there were millions of dollars spent attacking Tim Kaine on energy issues and accusing him of supporting policies that would cripple the state's coal industry and force electricity prices to jump. It failed. LCV invested more than \$2 million in that race and climate change denier George Allen lost by 5 points.

Ken Cuccinelli and his allies used the same playbook in the governor's race and his attacks have also fallen flat. Terry McAuliffe has led in every public poll in the months leading up to Election Day, and in our final poll of the race, leads Cuccinelli on who [voters trust on energy](#) issues.

The votes still need to be cast and tallied, but the Virginia governor's race has already amplified two trends we saw in the Senate race last cycle, which have significantly shifted the politics in this swing state: coal is no longer a winning wedge issue and denying the problem of climate change and blocking action to address it is a much greater political liability.

This shift has happened for two central reasons:

- 1) **The environmental community is showing up—in a big way.** Environmental groups will actually outspend the fossil-fuel industry in this race. This may be a first, particularly when there's been such a clear contrast between the candidates. We do not expect this to be the norm and count on being outspent by our opponents in 2014. But what has changed is that LCV - and the environmental community more broadly - are showing up with more than enough money to get our message out and highlight the contrast between the candidates on energy and climate change.
 - a. **Biggest donor in the race.** Virginia League of Conservation Voters PAC (VALCV PAC), our state league partner, will be [the single biggest cash contributor to the McAuliffe campaign](#) other than the Democratic Governors Association. In fact, outside of the party committees on both sides, VALCV PAC is likely to emerge as the single biggest cash contributor to either candidate period. All told, VALCV PAC will have contributed nearly \$1.7 million to the McAuliffe campaign including in-kind activities. This continues a trend set in 2012, when national LCV was the biggest issue group spending on Tim Kaine's behalf and LCV Action Fund emerged as his biggest bundler.

- b. **Biggest field program.** When the polls close, VALCV PAC will have knocked on more than 300,000 doors in this race, the largest effort by any outside group in the race. This is the kind of grassroots activity the fossil fuel industry can't match. When we go door-to-door and inform voters that Ken Cuccinelli doesn't believe climate change is real, it concerns voters and underscores how extreme and out-of-touch his views are. The coal industry lacks a message that resonates with a broad segment of voters. And in case anyone thinks we are resting on our laurels, VALCV PAC will knock on more than a 100,000 doors in the final five days of the race alone.

We won't be able to replicate this in every race, but our goal is to make sure that whenever there is a stark contrast between the candidates on energy and climate change, that we'll be able to play a critical role in shaping the race. In other words, the fossil fuel industry no longer has the playing field to themselves and will have to contend with voters hearing about their preferred candidate's extreme and unpopular views on energy and climate change.

- 2) **The public strongly supports action on climate change.** When the public hears messages from both sides on this issue, they overwhelming support our position:
 - a. **McAuliffe more trusted on energy issues.** Ken Cuccinelli is one of the most unabashed deniers of climate change in the country and wrote in his most recent book that "the only 'scientific consensus' about manmade global warming seemed to be that it is really a consensus of uncertainty—uncertainty that was never shared with the public." In the campaign, he has continued to proudly carry the coal industry's mantle and made energy issues a cornerstone of his campaign. His leadership in suing the EPA and defending the coal industry were core to his candidacy and central to his stump speech. He ran at least two [ads attacking](#) McAuliffe for supporting President Obama's supposed "war on coal." But Terry McAuliffe [leaned into](#) these issues as well, running [two hard-hitting](#) ads of his own that highlight Cuccinelli's denial of climate science. In fact, this is the first time ever that a candidate has run an ad exclusively focused on his opponent's denial of climate science. In the [Washington Post's](#) most recent poll in the race, McAuliffe held an 8 point advantage on who voters trusted more on energy and environmental issues.
 - b. **Climate change deniers like Cuccinelli are out-of-touch with voters.** A [recent poll](#) conducted by Hart Research on behalf of LCV in 11 red and purple states, including Virginia, underscores this point. Even after hearing the most frequent arguments against EPA's new regulations on power plants, including that it is part of "Obama's war on coal," would raise electricity rates, and kill jobs—all messages that Cuccinelli has made central to his campaign—voters still support the EPA's regulations by a 64-24 margin. The fact is that voters don't believe there's a "war on coal". However, the public does believe that climate change is real, and that we should do something about it, including limiting carbon pollution from power plants. The public's views have been confirmed in [poll](#) after [poll](#) after [poll](#) after [poll](#). Our opponents can ignore these polls, but they can't ignore the voters, and we expect the result in this race to speak for itself.

Virginia used to be a state where the coal industry shaped the political landscape. That's no longer the case. Public opinion and political influence in the state have shifted and the trend we saw in 2012 has only gotten stronger. Candidates can continue deny the basic science of climate change and fight tooth and nail to block all efforts to address it, but they do so at a much greater risk to their political future.