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Poll shows dead heat in New Jersey congressional battle



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A BLOG BY DAVE DAVIES



An early poll shows a dead heat in the battle for the New Jersey congressional seat being vacated by Republican Jon Runyan. The Stockton College poll shows Republican businessman Tom MacArthur and the Democrat, Burlington County Freeholder Aimee Belgard literally tied with 42.5 percent each.

The fact that 85 percent of voters have an opinion about the candidates for the 3rd District seat no doubt reflects the fact that hard-hitting TV ads began appearing over the summer.

The poll shows MacArthur with a 26 percent unfavorable rating, a bruise in part inflicted by scathing TV ads from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. And Belgard carries a 21 percent unfavorable rating after MacArthur responded with an attack on her record as a local official.

Daniel Douglas is director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, which conducted the poll. He said the survey confirms this is one of a handful of truly competitive races in the country.

"I imagine both candidates were on the phone today, calling the national party and calling key donors across the country, pointing to the poll saying, 'We need your help,'" Douglas said.'

The poll is seen as more encouraging to the Democrat, Belgard, since the district historically has been held by Republicans.

The campaigns react

I called both campaigns for comment. I got the following from MacArthur campaign consultant Chris Russell:

"Despite President Obama winning this district twice, our internal polling shows Tom leading this race and so does an internal poll leaked by the national Democrats earlier today.

The Stockton poll, while badly underestimating Republican strength in Ocean County, still shows Tom with both higher favorable ratings and lower negative ratings than dishonest politician and trial lawyer Aimee Belgard -- proof that the more voters know her, the less they like her.

We're winning this race now and will win it in November because voters want a successful businessman who will reach across party lines to create jobs for the middle-class like Tom MacArthur, not a hyper-partisan trial lawyer and politician, with a history of higher taxes and lying about her record, like Aimee Belgard.

Tom MacArthur has received endorsements from business groups and private sector unions because he is the best candidate in this race to end the gridlock in Washington and get our economy going again. That will be the difference in this race."

This came from Belgard campaign manger Hannah Ledford:

"The Stockton Poll confirms that this is one of the most competitive House races in the nation, showing a dead-heat less than two months from election day. Bu