



The Trailblazer

The Niagara Group of The Sierra Club • <http://NiagaraSierraClub.com> • Vol. 55 No. 4 October 2020

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter 2020 Candidate Endorsements

The Sierra Club, Atlantic Chapter, has endorsed five Western New York candidates. All have served previous terms in office and were supporters of the NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and other key environmental bills. All received excellent ratings from Environmental Advocates of NY and the NY League of Conservation Voters.

Patrick Burke

candidate for NYS Assembly (District 142)

Karen McMahan

candidate for NYS Assembly (District 146)

Crystal Peoples-Stokes

candidate for NYS Assembly (District 141)

Monica Wallace

candidate for NYS Assembly (District 143)

Sean Ryan

candidate for NYS Senate (District 60)

The Atlantic Chapter also endorsed two new candidates running for state offices.

William (Bill) Conrad III

candidate for NYS Assembly (District 140)

Mr. Conrad is a Town of Tonawanda Board member. He has been a leader of the town's Clean Energy Program

where successfully advocated for solar arrays on landfills, LED street lights, and the purchase of electrical vehicles for the town. He worked with the Clean Air Coalition on the closing of Tonawanda Coke facility and the Huntley power plant. If elected to the NYS Assembly, he has pledged to advocate for implementation of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, and solar, wind and geothermal programs and oppose expansion of fossil fuels and nuclear energy.

Jacqui Berger

candidate for NY Senate (District 61)

Ms. Berger is a Town of Amherst Board member. She serves as Deputy Town Supervisor and chair of the Town's Clean Energy Committee. If elected to the NYS Senate she will advocate for implementation of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act; wind, solar, and geothermal energy; and expansion of electrical vehicles and mass transit. She opposes nuclear energy and hydrofracking.

The National Sierra Club has endorsed the following Congressional and Presidential candidates:

Nate McMurray

candidate for US Congress (District 27)

As former supervisor of Grand Island, NY, McMurray called for the closing coal energy plant, a coke facility and toll booths that had an adverse impact on the health of the residents of Grand Island and adjacent towns.

McMurray successfully promoted solar energy farms on Grand Island. If elected to the U.S. House, McMurray has pledged to support the Paris Climate Agreement, the Clean Air and Water Acts, and the phase out of fossil fuels and nuclear energy and policies that would expand renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emission to near zero by 2050.

Joseph Biden

candidate for US President

"No president has been worse for our environment or our nation's public health than Donald Trump. He has sold off our public lands to corporate polluters, waged unprecedented attacks on environmental protections, and prioritized the desires of fossil fuel company executives over the best interests of the American people at every turn. In contrast, Joe Biden has laid out a bold vision of safeguarding our air and water, transitioning to a clean energy economy, and investing in communities that for too long have been left behind and forced to deal with the pollution caused by our reliance on fossil fuels," said Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune. "These ambitious plans came as a result of listening to the calls of the climate justice movement, and we are committed to continuing to hold Biden accountable to making them a reality and evolving still further."

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NIAGARASIERRACLUB.ORG

SEE IMPORTANT ELECTION BIOS BELOW AND BALLOTS ON PAGE 2!

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Elections 2020: Time to Vote!

As a member of the Sierra Club, you are asked to participate in two elections this fall. The first is our Niagara Group election of members of the Executive Committee – see information in this Trailblazer. The other election is for members At Large for the Atlantic Chapter (New York State) of the Sierra Club. Information will be available in the next issue of Sierra Atlantic, and also on the website: <http://atlantic2.sierraclub.org/>. We ask for your considered participation!!! Please read the following biographies of the candidates.

Ellen Cardone Banks

I've been an active member of the Niagara Group ExCom for several years and I hope to continue for another term. My involvement has included, when in-person events were possible, tabling, testifying at Department of Environmental Conservation hearings, connecting with elected officials at the town, county, state and federal levels, writing many letters to editors and op-eds, participating in many rallies for anti-fracking and renewable energy both locally and in Albany, meeting frequently with our coalition partners and helping to plan ExCom meetings. We're doing as many of these things as possible on virtual platforms.

I was elected to the Atlantic Chapter ExCom in January 2018 and asked to serve as Conservation Chair, then re-elected to this position in 2019. It has been an intensive and rewarding experience. With weekly calls on pending state legislation, I've been able to inform our Group about the environmental bills that affect our region. I also served as Chapter secretary in 2018 and was re-elected Conservation Chair in 2019, and am now representing the Chapter at the Council of Club Leaders, which just completed its first 4-day virtual meeting to exchange ideas among Sierra Club leaders in the US and Canada.

In 2017, I became involved in the Beyond Coal Campaign, a position that involves weekly conference calls and two or three planning meetings a year with National staff and volunteers. Concentrating on

Offshore Wind and other renewable energy for several years, the team is now deeply involved in statewide transportation policy, which will support our local work electrifying transportation.

I'm a retired professor of Psychological Science at Daemen College, and having taught generations of students to understand and practice scientific method and standards of evidence, the assault on science and facts of our present national administration is very concerning to me. Recent false opposition narratives on solar, land-based and offshore wind in Lake Erie continue, and we have to stand up for facts and science.

Having celebrated our role in passing New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act in 2019, we are now moving to implementation in wind, solar, storage and efficiency with environmental justice in the forefront and thousands of family-supporting jobs and career-promoting training and manufacturing across the state. Through the Renewable Energy Growth and Community Development Act, I worked with other volunteers and Sierra Club staff on an assessment process for utility-scale renewable projects. We have applied it to a local wind project proposal, resulting in our Chapter's endorsement, and will be applying the same process to large scale solar installations.

As we move toward a clean energy future, we continue to support green and wild spaces and to oppose sprawl and unwise development. We must

do our best to be sure that green outdoor places are available and inviting to everyone. I look forward to continuing this agenda into 2021 and on.

Larry Beahan

I have served on the Sierra Club Niagara Group Executive Committee since 1995 and have enjoyed almost every minute of it. There have been some hassles and some defeats, but some pretty great achievements too.

The relicensing of the Niagara Power Project in 2007 with a half billion in reparations coming to the communities along the Niagara River was undoubtedly the highpoint. Those moneys have brought us the parks, trails, waterways and green and blue spaces of the Niagara River Greenway.

Banning fracking for natural gas was another great victory for the environment in which we had an important part. Allegany State Park was both a victory and a disappointment. A disappointment in that National Fuel got a 15-year extension on their lease of 5000 acres in the heart of the Park. But the private ownership of gas and oil rights under the Park are extinguished and the Parks forest has been protected from commercial logging. Much of it has been designated a natural preserve.

Currently, we are engaged in the redevelopment of Buffalo's Outer Harbor. This strip of land southwest of the Buffalo River was once the Buffalo River estuary. In the course of 200 years,

Continued on back page

“Elections” continued from front page

with thousands of tons of waste fill and the protection of a break wall this area was industrialized with steel and automobile factories, grain elevators and deep water slips for freighters. Then that industry disappeared. There was great temptation to build expensive high-rise residences there. Sierra along with other far sighted organizations including the Buffalo Museum of Science, Times Beach and the Olmstead Conservancy have persuaded the authorities that this beautiful waterscape with great fishing boating and unbelievable sunsets should be preserved as a great natural park the southern anchor of the Greenway.

Our greatest efforts now are honed onto climate change as we promote electric vehicles, solar power for schools, wind turbines on our windy lake fronts, fight gas pipelines and engage unions, environmental groups, cultural organizations and the people of Western NY in this effort to keep our planet livable.

All this has been a goldmine of material for folks like me and the other members of our Sierra “Writer’s Group.” Look for us on the Editorial page of the Buffalo News.

Bob Ciesielski

My experience serving on the Executive Committee dates back to 2004. My role in the Sierra Club has varied over time, including my service as SCNG Chair for 5 years. I am now serving as Delegate-At-Large to the NYS Atlantic Chapter, comprised of more than 50,000 members. In 2012, I was appointed as Energy Committee Chair for the Chapter and am also serving this year as Chapter Vice-Chair. I have been actively involved in energy work during my time with the Sierra Club, initially imposing high volume fracking for natural gas as an environmental threat. Currently, I am actively involved in the development of renewable energy sourced from wind, solar, and geothermal, as well as promoting energy efficiency in all sectors – electricity, heating and cooling, transportation and manufacturing. This new, sustainable energy economy can help curtail climate change and protect the environment – all the while creating a vibrant economy and jobs.

In the past two years, NYS has adopted several of the strongest renewable energy laws in the country: The 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act and this year’s Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act. I would be honored to serve on the Executive Committee Board 2021-2022.

Janet Lenichek

The spring of 2018 was the beginning of my activity with the Sierra Club Niagara Group and within one year I became a board member in January 2019. As of January 2020, my role expanded toward becoming an At-Large Delegate with the Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee.

During my tenure with the SCNG Executive Committee, I have been the Secretary and have been serving as Co-Chair of the Political Committee with Roger Cook. During the summer of 2019, I

worked with Roger to revise the SCNG Candidate Questionnaire and ensure that all local candidates for public office completed the Questionnaire by mid-August. This project helped the SCNG to endorse the best local and regional candidates who aligned with the in-terests of the Sierra Club.

This year, I have been working diligently to assist in political campaigns of candidates who have been endorsed by the Sierra Club. I did 3 months of phone banking for Nate McMurray’s campaign in the spring and currently I’m spending my free time doing letters and phone bank-ing for SC Independent Action “Plan to Win” campaign. This campaign aims to “get out the vote” for Biden, Harris and other candidates who are endorsed by the Sierra Club.

I also continue to represent the SCNG as part of the Buffalo Good Food Coalition (BGFC) which has been working diligently over the past 3 years to bring the Good Food Purchasing Program to institutions in the WNY area. We are taking solid steps forward and I continue to help the BGFC advocate for legislation that aligns with the 5 values of the Good Food Purchasing Program (a values-based food purchasing program).

I am asking for your vote, so I can continue the important work I have started. I am highly motivated to elect the best environmental candidates possible at the local, regional, state and federal level. I also want to continue to push forward the best local, state and federal legislation that will support the goals of the Sierra Club in WNY, New York state and across the US.

Abdur-Rahman Morgan

Abdur-Rahman Morgan has been a volunteer with the Sierra Club Niagara Group since 2019. As a volunteer over the past year, he has dedicated time tabling at events promoting SCNG initiatives focused on clean energy and transportation. He has dedicated time during his first year attending national training for the ‘Ready for 100’ campaign.

Mr. Morgan currently advocates for vehicle electrification and infrastructure. In 2020, his efforts have been centered on discussion between electric vehicle drivers and the Engineering team for EvolveNY, a program of the New York Power Authority, which focuses on supporting the development of Direct Current Fast Charging (DCFC) infrastructure in New York State. Mr. Morgan also serves on the SCNG Zero Emissions Bus committee, which seeks to promote transit bus electrification in our region by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority.

As the Sierra Club transitioned to public meetings online during the pandemic, he has assisted in training volunteers to navigate Zoom, the basics of the video conferencing application, as well as providing support for the Niagara Chapter in scheduling meetings for the monthly Niagara Group Executive Committee, ZEB Committee and lobbying in 2020.

In serving as a member of the Niagara Chapter Executive Committee, Mr. Morgan endeavors to commit to the work he has started as a volunteer and fur-

ther build relationships with members and our allies, locally and online to increase engagement as it relates to groups work and those of the Atlantic Chapter.

John Szalasny

Most of the Executive Board members have at least one issue in which they specialize. It took a while, but I finally found my voice on an issue and would like your support in continuing to work on a health and environmental issue. The issue – waste. More specifically, single use plastics.

Many of you have seen my articles in the Trailblazer or on a wide variety of topics in the Letter to the Editor section of the Buffalo News. In 2019, I began to focus on the waste issue because of the upheaval in recycling due to the Chinese National Sword policy which banned plastic waste imports. I started with the lowest hanging fruit, working on a ban on Styrofoam containers and polystyrene utensils. I created a presentation and the Facebook group – Bring NYC’s Styrofoam Ban to My Hometown! <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2098476837129562/> to support efforts to get local single use legislation passed, including working with the City of Buffalo on their pending Styrofoam legislation. I have also been watching other non-plastic waste issues in the state, such as small and large scale food waste composting and the radioactive waste issue at the Hakes Landfill in Steuben County.

Even though New York State passed a foam food service packaging ban that will go into effect in 2022, there is much more to be done. With fossil fuel companies building new facilities to ramp up plastic production, getting the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act passed in New York looks like a near future priority. I would be honored to continue serving on the Executive Committee.

NYS Action on Climate Change Should Include Divestment in Fossil Fuel Investments

by John Szalasny

Fossil Fuel Divestment has been in the news recently as a coalition of groups has been asking State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli to sell off oil, gas and coal investments in the State Common Retirement Fund (SCRF). In July, the State announced that the SCRF divested from over 20 thermal coal companies. Although a step in the right direction, this is a drop in the bucket for a state that claims to be a leader in fighting climate change.

The demand to divest NY pension funds started 8 years ago as a response to Hurricane Sandy, which devastated New York City. In that time, universities in the state such as Syracuse, SUNY New Paltz, and Cornell have divested their sizeable endowment funds. But the State Comptroller has not budged to date on oil and gas investments.

Why is divestment so important? As SUNY New Paltz President Donald Christian said “This divestment from fossil fuels is the right thing to do. Climate change resulting from the use of fossil fuels presents issues of significant concern to all.” Divestment works by depressing the value of the stock and the net worth of the company, which in turn significantly raises the cost of borrowing capital for investment in new infrastructure projects like fracking wells, pipelines, and petrochemical plants dedicated to plastic production.

Because divestment works on the price of the stock, it also depresses the net worth of any investment portfolio with oil and gas stocks. After spending decades as the most profitable corporation on the planet, Exxon Mobil was recently dropped from the S&P 500 index. This is indicative of the price drops of all the major oil stocks. Research done in 2018 by Corporate Knights, a sustainable business magazine, shows that the SCRF would be \$22.2 BILLION richer if the state had divested 10 years ago.

Recently, a petition with more than 1,000 scientists and academic professionals was delivered to the Comptroller’s office urging that the state divests the SCRF from all fossil fuels. In addition, the NYS Legislature is considering the Fossil Fuel Divestment Act (S2126-A/A1536-A), which would require the Comptroller to divest from all fossil fuel holdings within 5 years. This bill has the support of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

It’s not often that we can save the planet and profit from it at the same time. Please contact your local representative and urge them to support this bill.

Nominees for 2021-22 term on Niagara Group Executive Committee

IMPORTANT: Single Membership - Use one ballot. Joint Membership - Use both ballots. Ballots must be received by December 25, 2020

NIAGARA GROUP OFFICIAL BALLOTS

BALLOT 1

Board of Governance At-Large Delegates
Choose up to 6 board members

- ELLEN BANKS
- LARRY BEAHAN
- BOB CIESIELSKI
- JANET LENICHEK
- ABDUR-RAHMAN MORGAN
- JOHN SZALASNY

BALLOT 2

Board of Governance At-Large Delegates
Choose up to 6 board members

- ELLEN BANKS
- LARRY BEAHAN
- BOB CIESIELSKI
- JANET LENICHEK
- ABDUR-RAHMAN MORGAN
- JOHN SZALASNY

Election Instructions: To be eligible to vote, you must be a member in good standing with the Niagara Group as verified by a member’s mailing label. Please read all of the candidates’ statements on Page 2. Indicate your choices by checking the box next to the candidates’ names on the ballot. Each member may complete one ballot. Joint members may complete two ballots. Please detach this page and mail your ballot(s) to the address below in an ordinary letter-size envelope with proper postage. Send your ballots to:

Niagara Group Elections Committee • Sierra Club Niagara Group • P.O. Box 1127 • Williamsville, NY 14221-1127

Ballots must be received on or before 12/25/2020