



# SIERRA CLUB

## NORTH CAROLINA

### 2020 NC Sierra Club State Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

The NC Sierra Club Political Committee is a state political action committee (PAC) dedicated to electing pro-environment candidates. Please complete this survey and return it to Cassie Gavin, Director of Government Affairs, at [cassie.gavin@sierraclub.org](mailto:cassie.gavin@sierraclub.org).

*Your responses will be privileged and confidential, will NOT be posted online or released to the public, and will only be seen by Sierra Club political committee volunteers and staff.*

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**Occupation:** Full Time  
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**Lane Candidate**

**Candidate** **for:**  
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**Lane**

**General:**

1. Would you like to be publicly endorsed by Sierra Club? If so, why would the Sierra Club's endorsement be important to you and your campaign?

~Yes I would like to be publicly endorsed by Sierra Club. The Sierra Club endorsement is important to myself and my campaign because not only is environmental justice reform a cornerstone of my campaign but also because I'm running against a two opponents that it would help solidify one of our main differences. When running in a 3-way race where you are fighting to established parties with two seasoned candidates endorsements such as from the Sierra Club go a long way in helping establish legitimacy for a new campaign and candidate.

2. Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy and protect the planet. What do you consider to be the most important actions you have taken or roles you have played to protect the environment or to further environmental justice as an elected official? In your professional or personal life?

~I consider every action any of us take to do our part no matter how small to be important actions to protect our environment first and foremost. Little actions become big movements. As for environmental justice since the time I was in middle school I have worked for environmental reform starting as a member of the NC Green Team. I now live on 18 acres of farm and forest land that I have essentially created a reserve on where environment and wildlife alike are kept safe. I work to make sure that we all especially those in rural areas have access and maintain access to clean water sources from agricultural waste as well as commercial waste. As an elected official I could do more as many of the changes that I see that need to be made require legislative reform to complete.

3. What do you consider to be the top two most important environment or environmental justice issues facing the state? As a legislator, what actions would you take to address these issues?

~Like with the rest of the world one of the most important environmental issues facing NC is climate change. We have a unique eco system on our coast that we can't afford to lose. We have to make sure we are able to maintain the natural beauty while still being forward thinking by transitioning to solar, wind, tide powered sources as well as making sure off shore drilling and inland fracking don't further complicate and contaminate our waters and surrounding lands. Issue 2 ties directly into that with pushing forward access to clean energy. We are 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for solar capacity but because of regulations and lobbyist don't see that same level of access to that very energy we produce. While we move away from fossil fuels for clean energy sources we also have to undo regulations that prohibit access such as the ban in NC on 3<sup>rd</sup> party sales which limit many from being able to purchase solar equipment. We also need to do more with grants to incentivize electrical companies to assist with homeowner installation and access in exchange for lower rates.

4. As a legislator, there will be times when your position on an environmental issue may differ from that of your caucus. How would you resolve such a situation?

~As an independent being a registered Green I'm already in a unique position in that I would be the first in the state Legislature but also in a position that I can help break through the political gridlock. Much of what I hear off the record from elected officials is there are many bills they personally want to support but their party voters see working with the other side

as “selling out”. Because I’m not the other side I’m able to help introduce legislation that can get true bipartisan support without either side having to worry about looking as if they are selling out so we can move forward more quickly and cut through red tape. As for differing with those I may caucus with I daily differ with individuals but I don’t see that as a bad thing. My approach as a candidate of unity has always been to build from the center out meaning you first find what aspects you can agree on and build out from a place of common ground instead of doing what most attempt and forcing the wedge. Politics is about understanding the game of compromise in the end and with my background I’m use to not only working with and handling big personalities but understanding how to navigate the waters to reach the goal I need to reach.

5. Sierra Club supports democracy and opposes gerrymandering; the Chapter supports independent redistricting. Do you? Why or why not?

~I have campaigned on independent redistricting since before it was a key issue let alone a popular opinion. I have always understood that whichever party is in party will try to hold on to that power by shaping maps to give themselves an advantage and as long as we allow the very people who stand to benefit from it to continue to create we will continue to see just that. My position has always been we use technology. NC is a hub of technology and we have the resources to have an algorithm designed that would allow us to simply put in the Constitutional guidelines required with the census information and have a program create fair districts truly free of partisan lean or any individual member of the Legislature looking to protect their seat. For oversight we still have an independent board made up equally of a representative from every recognized party in the state to remove all bias.

### **Energy:**

7. Governor Cooper’s Executive Order 80 calls on NC to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 40% below 2005 levels. To get there, the DEQ clean energy plan calls for the state to reduce its carbon footprint 70% by 2030, which will require a move away from fossil fuel power. The Order also prioritizes environmental justice. Do you support these goals? If so, how would you lead the way to achieve them?

~I do support these goals as I don’t see them as unrealistic based on projections. What I would do to lead the way is as discussed previously working to strengthen clean energy sources to more quickly help with our transition, as well as make changes to tax code such as with our gas tax to incentive speeding up the change. One of the big reasons so many are dragging their feet is they fear what happens if we move away from fossil fuels and have to also find the funding the gas tax currently gives us elsewhere. The sooner we transition that the sooner we bring more elected officials to the table of clean energy alternatives. Next as we see business and industry continue to thrive in NC we make it clear that any company looking to receive incentives must agree to be carbon neutral by 2030.

8. In 2007, the General Assembly passed the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (REPS), which requires utilities to source 12.5% of energy from renewables by 2021 and onward. Many other states have higher REPS and Duke Energy has met the goal. Would you support raising that percentage to 70% by 2030 - like the goal in the state clean energy plan? Why or why not?

~I fully support raising the percentage as I don’t believe 12.5% will get us to where we need to be by 2030 but I can’t say today that I would support it being 70%. The reason is I simply

don't have the data that verifies or signifies that would be the best course of action. What I can guarantee is that I would call for a review so that we are able to get the data and I would base my decision off the results combined with a round table of environmental and industry leaders to find the best compromise that allows us to reach our goal while also not reversing the trend we are seeing in business and job growth.

9. North Carolina is a leader in solar development, and the solar industry supports more than 34,000 jobs here. But the legislature allowed the NC Renewable Energy Investment Tax Credit, which was helpful for the expansion of rooftop solar, to expire. Would you support reinstating this tax credit? Why or why not?

~I do support reinstating as well as removing many of the regulations that deter so many from solar energy. We have to gain access to Third Party Sales, and increase grants to increase use and installation.

10. North Carolina is one of only a few states that do not allow solar energy sales by third parties such as solar companies directly to consumers, a practice that makes solar more affordable. Would you support legalizing third-party energy sales? Why or why not?

~It is one of my campaign pledges is to overturn legislation and regulations that forbid the practice. It is one of the key differences between myself and my opponents who neither support lifting this ban.

11. The Trump administration wants to open our coast to offshore drilling. Our tourism and fishing industries will be at risk if there is a spill. Do you support or oppose drilling for oil and gas off our coast? Why?

~I oppose all offshore drilling due to the risk to wildlife and water ways. We have seen time and again what happens when regulations are lifted and the lack of oversight allows cost cutting measures to occur. We can't afford such a catastrophe on our coast. The risk are far to severe compared to the reward.

12. North Carolina has the greatest offshore wind resources of any state on the East Coast. Do you support or oppose offshore wind development off our coast? Why?

~I support offshore wind resources as unlike offshore drilling there is no risk to the wildlife, the water ways, the way of life, or the beauty of our coast.

## **Environmental Justice**

13. There's a scarcity of affordable housing for low-income people in our state. Sierra Club supports communities with affordable housing that is accessible with transit, bike and pedestrian transportation options. How can the state support communities that want to address this? Do you support having affordable housing provide residents access to public transit within a reasonable distance and via a safe, walkable route? Why or why not?

~I agree that we have a scarcity of affordable housing and under my infrastructure plan in my campaigns platform it is an issue I address as well as increasing access to public transit. The main thing the state can do to assist these communities is pass policies that would allow municipalities the flexibility to implement policy to provide equitable housing. We can

authorize municipalities with the ability to implement potential solutions such as impact fees, inclusionary zoning, and create state incentives for municipalities to create community land trust and rent stabilization vouchers in order to protect vulnerable residents. Combined with increasing funding and assisting municipalities with inner city public transit options we open up access while at the same time reducing our carbon footprint.

## **Environmental Protection**

14. North Carolina's coastal forests are being harvested to create wood pellets to be shipped to Europe and burned for energy. This process releases greenhouse gases, and the industry logs an estimated 50,000 acres of North Carolina forest per year. The Sierra Club prefers a transition to clean energy. As a legislator, would you support policies to protect North Carolina's forests from being harvested for wood pellets? Why or why not?

~I would do more than simply protect NC forest from being harvested for wood pellets I would work to make sure much less of NC forest are harvested at all. In my district I have seen what is in essence strip mining occurring more and more over the last decade where once lush forest stood now there is just nothing. Not only does it create problems with more wildlife entering populated areas due to lack of food and shelter but it also has shown increase flooding in surrounding area due to run off and the lack of protection that such wooded areas bring.

15. In 2017 chemical contamination was discovered in the Cape Fear River coming from the Chemours plant in Fayetteville. Chemical contamination has been found in other drinking water supplies. Do you support increased funding for state agencies to address contaminated drinking water? Would you support stronger water quality laws?

~I do support increased funding as well support stronger water quality laws. How many more news articles do we have to see flash on our screens of lethal chemical compounds being found in dangerous levels before we realize that our current water quality laws aren't sufficient. Growing up in rural NC I remember when I was younger county water had not yet reached us and we relied on a well. Testing indicated additives and because of such myself and all the other children had to take additional nutrients. It wasn't until reaching adulthood that we saw the implications. Most of the children from my community during that time (myself included) found we all had the same condition of our teeth rotting from the gum which dentist after dentist stated was due to the additive we had to take. I understand first hand how water quality is a long term health risk that we can and should do better to guarantee everyone has access to better quality.

16. Do you support increased funding for the Clean Water Management Trust Fund and other North Carolina conservation trust funds? Why or why not?

~I do support increasing funding to the CWMTF and other conservation trust funds. The work that has been done because of the grants these trust fund go far and above what we are seeing the state produce. When we put the money in the hands of those who are motivated to make the environment a priority we get the most return on our investment.

Thank you for your response. Please feel free to share additional information with us. Please return this form to [cassie.gavin@sierraclub.org](mailto:cassie.gavin@sierraclub.org). Please call Cassie Gavin at (919) 833-8467 ext. 104 with questions.

