

Champions and Significant Retirements, Who Will Step Up?

A Salute to Retiring Environmental Champions:

In winter 2021, two champions of the environment are retiring from the New Jersey State Senate: Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen) and Kip Bateman (R-Somerset). Although representing different sides of the aisle, both have been longtime leaders on clean energy and the environment, and neither has been afraid to buck party leadership when the environmental cause was just. Moving forward, Clean Water Action will miss both legislators, but now the search is on to find the next team of environmental champions to carry the baton.



Senator Loretta Weinberg has been a progressive leader throughout her political career and has not been afraid to take on bullies from Governor Christie to corrupt party bosses. She is a longtime advocate for environmental justice and championed the recently passed Environmental Justice Law. She has called for a moratorium on all new fossil fuel projects and fought alongside local activists to defeat the proposed Meadowlands gas plant. She continues to lead the charge to overhaul and reform NJ Transit to ensure New Jersey has a reliable and affordable mass transit system for years to come. Her progressive voice in leadership will be missed.



Senator Kip Bateman has been a consistent voice in the fight against climate change and is the current standard-bearer for New Jersey's long tradition of environmental bipartisanship. He has opposed both the PennEast and NESE gas pipelines and co-sponsored legislation to push New Jersey to achieve 100% green energy by 2035. With his retirement, it becomes difficult to find any remaining environmental leaders in New Jersey's Republican ranks which is a shame as our state was once known as a place where the two parties worked together to solve environmental crises.

With the retirement of these two senators, we will need more legislators to stand up and fight for clean air, clean water, and our climate future. Our current “heroes” list has some familiar champions and some emerging leaders. Ideally, this list would be a majority of the legislature. We look forward to adding more names, from both sides of the aisle, in our next scorecard.



Current Heroes:

It's easy to evaluate legislators just on how they voted, but it isn't very informative. What legislators do behind the scenes before the final floor vote is harder to measure, but these efforts determine the strength of the bill or even whether a bill gets a final floor vote at all. The following legislators went the extra mile to move pro-environment bills forward this term, and they deserve special recognition for their efforts.

SENATE

Troy Singleton (D-7) led the way on environmental and climate justice this term. He personally willed the Environmental Justice Law across the finish line, was the prime sponsor of the Lead Service Line Replacement Law, and is the legislative leader of the Clean Energy Equity bill.

Linda Greenstein (D-14) is the prime sponsor of the Green Amendment and the Measuring Climate Impacts Law and used her influence as chair of a special committee to help pass the Lead Service Line Replacement Law.

Shirley Turner (D-15) played a key role in the seven year campaign that just succeeded in stopping the PennEast frack gas pipeline along the Delaware River. She also serves her constituents fighting for better mass transit and playgrounds and ballfields without toxic pesticides.

Bob Smith (D-17) is the environmental nerve center of the Senate with his fingerprints all over the passage of the Electric Vehicle Law, Food Waste Law, Bag Ban Law, Offshore Wind Law, Grid Scale Solar Law, and Dual Use Solar Law. He is currently driving the Recycled Content Bill to the finish line.

Richard Codey (D-27) pushes pro-environment bills as a member of the Senate Environment Committee using his experience as a former governor and Senate President.

Teresa Ruiz (D-29) smartly leveraged her yes vote on the Food Waste Law to protect her community and help secure passage of the Environmental Justice Law. She is also a leading opponent of proposed polluting frack gas and sludge facilities in Newark.

Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Coughlin also deserve recognition for overseeing bicameral passage of eleven significant pro-environmental laws over the past two years.

ASSEMBLY

Dan Benson (D-14) is a perennial champ who helped drive the Electric Vehicle Law to victory. He uses his leverage as a member of the crucial Budget Committee and as Chair of the Transportation and Utilities Committee to fight for strong environmental legislation.

Verlina Reynolds-Jackson (D-15) is a leading voice for fully funding the Clean Energy Fund and NJ Transit, opposes all new proposed fossil fuel projects, and is fighting to divest state pension funds from fossil fuels.

Andrew Zwicker (D-16) was the prime sponsor of the Accurately Measure Climate Impacts Law, has fought to stop raids of the Clean Energy Fund and NJ Transit, and, as chair of the Science and Innovation Committee, is advancing wind, solar, and battery storage technology.

Robert Karabinchak (D-18) was a prime sponsor of the Grid Scale Solar Law and the inaugural chairman of the Special Committee on Infrastructure and Natural Resources where he shepherded the Lead Service Line Inventory Law to the Assembly floor.

James Kennedy (D-22) is the lead sponsor of the Electric Vehicles Law, Food Waste Law, and Bag Ban Law, and the new chair of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee.

John McKeon (D-27) is the Assembly's go-to guy for all things environment, was the prime sponsor of and leading advocate for the Environmental Justice Law.

He is the prime sponsor of the Green Constitutional Amendment and a key member of the Budget Committee supporting funding mass transit and clean energy.

Mila Jasey (D-27) is a key advocate against fossil fuels and supports a moratorium on fossil fuel projects. She also is an advocate for fully funding NJ Transit and the Clean Energy Fund.

Raj Mukherji (D-33) is a longtime outspoken leader against proposed fossil fuel projects like the NJ Transit frack gas power plant and the now defeated North Bergen Meadowlands frack gas power plant. He is an advocate for a moratorium on all new fossil fuel projects.

Britnee Timberlake (D-34) is the prime sponsor of the Environmental Justice Law and the leading legislator against the Garden State Parkway expansion into developed urban areas.

Shavonda Sumter (D-35) is one of the few legislators who supports "ending the line," a democratic reform to allow the public to hold their elected officials more accountable. She is a leader in the fight to stop lead poisoning and pass the Green Constitutional Amendment.

Clinton Calabrese (D-36) isn't afraid to take on powerful polluting interests as evidenced by his successful effort to stop the Meadowlands frack gas power plant proposed in North Bergen.