



The New York League of Conservation Voters

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2006 Environmental Questionnaire for New York State Legislative Candidates (challengers)

Candidate Name: Susan Zimet

District #: State Senate District 42

PERSONAL INITIATIVES

1. What have been your most significant achievements to date on environmental issues?

As a County Legislator representing the Town of New Paltz, I have been able to work across the aisle to accomplish environmental goals. As a member of the minority I worked with several legislators to force the county to finally update its own open space plan, which had not been done since 1971. The project is moving forward to completion this year.

I have also been in the forefront here in Ulster County in the efforts to close the Indian Point Power Plant. We have successfully passed resolutions calling for its shut down and support efforts for replacing it with an alternative energy center.

In addition, I have supported the instillation of solar panels on municipal buildings such as the Law Enforcement Facility and the County Office Building. I have also supported county efforts at greening our automobile and transit fleet by the use of B-20 (Blended Bio-Diesel/Diesel fuel) and a Hybrid Electric/Diesel bus.

Prior to my service as County Legislator, I served as Town Supervisor of New Paltz. In this role I protected wetlands and sensitive areas from development, most notably from a Wal-Mart that wanted to move into the community. This also protected valuable aquifers the community needs for future growth. I also fought hard on behalf of citizens during the expansion of the Ulster County Resource Recovery Agency (UCRRA) which deals with trash/recycling. In this situation I helped to protect wetlands from encroachment

2. Please outline your environmental priorities should you be elected.

I know that in 2006 the top five legislative priorities were Wetland Protection, the Bigger Better Bottle Bill, a Burn Barrel Ban, Carbon Caps on power plants and the Community Preservation act, all of which died in the Senate. If I am elected I will work with the environmental community on all of these issues. More importantly, if four other Democrats and I replace Republicans the leadership of the Senate will change and it will cease to be the graveyard of progressive environmental legislation. Although the incumbent requested to co-sponsor two of these bills, the bottle bill and the carbon cap, I can find no evidence that he used his influence with the party leadership in the Senate to move any of them to the floor for a vote. This is an important difference between us that I will be explaining to voters as they make up their minds who they want to represent them.

One of my top priorities will be to support a Community Preservation Act for the Hudson Valley, which would enable towns and counties to enact transfer taxes for environmental preservation and recreation. When I was Supervisor of the Town of New Paltz I always looked for ways to protect the open space that makes the Hudson Valley so special. New Paltz has a strong preservation ethic; we appreciate and understand the work that goes into protecting our heritage. It has also made financial sense as well because of our vibrant tourist economy, a mainstay in our Hudson Valley economy. It also helps to make more equitable the second home market in the Hudson Valley because second home buyers who wish to come to our Hudson Valley Communities can contribute towards preservation and protection efforts that makes our area so attractive when they buy their second home.

As a Senator I also plan to take on nuclear energy issues, including pushing for closure of Indian Point and replacing the power supply through alternative means such as solar, wind, conservation, biomass, etc.

ENERGY

The League has asked the Legislature to adopt legislation extending and amending Article X. The League believes new legislation should require that the applicant undertake an environmental justice analysis, a PM2.5 analysis and a cumulative impact analysis, and should lower the applicability threshold to 30 megawatts.

3. Please share with us your position on the adoption of legislation extending and amending Article X, any past involvement with this issue and your plan to integrate it in your campaign.

I stated above my long standing opposition to Indian Point Power Plant because of its close proximity to the New York Metro region. I also understand that the energy must be replaced at some point from other sources. It is important that New York State make a greater commitment to alternative energy sources and increased conservation efforts, but it is also important that we make conventional sources of energy more environmentally friendly. As a State Senator I will push for the legislature to adopt legislation extending and amending Article X. New legislation should require that the applicant undertake an environmental justice analysis, a PM2.5 analysis, and a cumulative impact analysis. I will push to ensure the State will hold conventional plants to the highest standards and hold the Public Service Commission to the 25% Renewable Portfolio Standard by 2013.

I also believe we need to closely look at mini-power plants, or micro-turbines, that are popping up in New York City and Long Island. As a native of Long Island I remember several of these plants being built in dense communities. I believe we need to take a look at protecting local populations by building better plants in less dense areas combined with upgrades in existing transmission infrastructure.

It should also be noted my opposition to the current New York Regional Interconnect, Inc. (NYRI) power line project coming from Utica to near the Stewart Airport. It is unnecessary, it induces sprawl, and if it is built along the presently proposed alignment, it will damage the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING

The League has asked the Legislature to increase the EPF from \$150 million to \$300 million, funded by the increase in revenue from the existing Real Estate Transfer Fee. We believe an expansion should start with an increase in the EPF to \$200 million in FY'06. Since the EPF's inception, we have consistently and strongly opposed the transfer of General Fund expenses, including state agency staff, to the EPF. We continue to oppose such transfers. While we oppose new categories without new funding, we support the addition of new categories with new funding.

4. Please share with us your position on increasing funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, any past involvement with this issue and your plan to integrate it in your campaign.

I will work to increase the EPF from \$150 million to \$300 million, funded by the increase in revenue from the existing Real Estate Transfer Fee. As is often the case the state government has found it convenient to pass fees intended for environmental uses back to the general fund, the way it did with the used tire surcharge in 2003. I will underscore my support for a generous EPF when I am addressing voters who are concerned about the environment, especially the preservation of open space.

I would also like to talk about my concern with the whole issue of taxes and funding because of how it relates back to budgetary matters. As a result of my experience at the local level (New Paltz Town Supervisor from 1999 through 2003) and in the county government (member Ulster County Legislature from 2004 until now) I can see that the system where State government requires local government, including schools, to take certain actions without providing the money for them has made local property taxes intolerable in many places. This is particularly true in fast growing areas, many of which are within the 42d Senate district. When I am elected, one of my top priorities will be a search for a better, fairer system of taxes that allow us to pay for our progressive agenda fairly. I will advocate for a set of taxes that discourage bad behavior by taxing it (like pollution) and encourage good actions by not taxing it (like wages). Obviously this is not just an environmental issue, nor will it be resolved in a year or two, but it is so important that I will pour my energy into doing it.

The League has asked the Legislature to pass a Community Preservation Act, which would allow all communities to vote to raise funds for local environmental and historic preservation projects.

5. Please share with us your position on allowing all communities to vote to raise funds for local environmental and historic preservation projects, any past involvement with this issue, and your plan to integrate it in your campaign.

As stated above I will push for a Community Preservation Act for the entire state, the way the Marcellino Bill did this year or at least for the Hudson Valley when I am elected to the State Senate. Currently, as a County Legislator I have supported updating the county's open space plan and supported using local dollars for open space acquisitions by issuing bonds. However it would be more fiscally prudent to charge new owners who will benefit from the preserved open space a transfer tax/fee as open space protection helps increase land values. It will also be a continuous source of revenue for an ever changing real estate market. We need this legislation as the fastest

growing area of the State. This issue will resonate especially with some voters in Ulster and Sullivan Counties who are suffering the bad effects of unwise growth.

The League has asked the Legislature to pass a Conservation Tax Credit, which partially compensates New York landowners who voluntarily sign agreements not to develop land, thereby protecting open space, farmland, water and wildlife, forever.

6. Please share with us your position on support for compensating New York landowners who voluntarily sign agreements not to develop land, thereby protecting open space, farmland, water and wildlife, forever. Also indicate any past involvement with this issue and your plan to integrate it in your campaign.

I will work to pass the Conservation Tax Credit, which partially compensates New York landowners who voluntarily sign agreements not to develop land, thereby protecting open space, farmland, water and wildlife, forever. As a legislator I have supported applications for farmland protection via purchase of development rights. However we will never have enough money to buy all the areas threatened by development. A tax credit might be the solution to chronic under funding of the PDR program. While I support the concept of the purchase of development rights and the decrease in taxes for certain land uses like farming or forestry, this can create a problem for the remaining taxpayers in a community dependant on property tax for its revenue. So I will at the same time be looking for prudent ways to transfer the development rights to a suitable location, while keeping them a part of the tax base. That makes a fairer sharing of the burden of environmental protection. I expect this issue to resonate best with voters in Delaware County where many forest owners are already getting the tax relief based on their agreement to manage their land for sustainable timber production.

SMART GROWTH:

The League has asked the Legislature to pass initiatives to encourage communities to plan for sound growth that would:

- Set a statutory standard for the amount of training required as a condition for reappointment of municipal planning and zoning officials,
 - Allow the governing bodies of municipalities, (as opposed to only citizens), to initiate a process of annexation to change local boundaries to facilitate regional approaches,
 - Allow municipalities to share sales tax revenues (as well as property taxes) in order to encourage cooperation instead of competition for economic activities and community facilities; and,
 - Fund municipal or regional TDR banks that would help to preserve land and focus growth in accordance with local and regional smart growth plans.
7. Please share with us your position on support for initiatives to encourage communities to plan for sound growth, any past involvement with this issue and your plan to integrate it in your campaign.

As Town Supervisor of New Paltz, I have been actively engaged in planning issues for several years. Our town has passed model regulations to curtail the development of so called "big box" stores and protect wetlands. Among many issues, I campaigned on open government and eliminating

good ole boys from appointed office, including the planning board and zoning board of appeals. We replaced them with committed professional volunteers and hired the first environmental engineer in the town's history. I will totally support setting statutory standards for municipal planning and zoning officials because we need the best informed planners making informed decisions.

I believe that communities extend well beyond municipal boundaries. As Town Supervisor I attempted to initiate a dialogue with the Village of New Paltz regarding dissolution of either the Town or Village in order to streamline planning, zoning, water, sewer, infrastructure and, of course, taxes. This would help the community's needs rather than the parochial needs of the local governments involved. I whole heartedly believe that we must consolidate, where appropriate, several layers of government to make efficient forward looking decisions on land use and to reduce property taxes at the same time.

The race to the bottom in local economic development is killing our quality of life here in the Hudson Valley. Competition between municipalities has eroded the local tax base because of the need to attract businesses. I have long advocated for communities to share revenue from those areas with growth potential and desire (i.e. areas that have infrastructure and welcome development) to share with those areas less appropriate for industrial or commercial development. This would allow for more harmonious growth and protect local planning and local tax payers from unreasonable giveaways to developers. Of all the good recommendations on this list, this is the closest to my heart. As I said above, in response to Question 5 (Environmental Protection Fund), we have to solve the issue of taxes and funding for local government. Allowing property tax revenue sharing between and among jurisdictions in a defined region is an important part of this effort. I will be working hard to develop and pass such legislation.

I support the concept of TDR banks but I am not sure whether local real estate values have created the proper atmosphere yet for them to work in the Hudson Valley. I understand they have been successful in the Pine Barrons region, however and I am willing to explore their implementation in the Hudson Valley. In short I support providing density bonuses in exchange for open space.

WETLANDS

The League has asked the Legislature to give DEC the regulatory authority necessary to protect New York's wetlands by lowering the threshold to one acre or more and eliminating the mapping limitations on DEC's regulatory authority over wetlands.

8. Please share with us your position on support for giving DEC the regulatory authority necessary to protect New York's wetlands, any past involvement with this issue, and your plan to integrate it in your campaign.

As you know 42nd Senatorial District, which includes all of Sullivan and Delaware Counties as well as most of Ulster and parts of Orange, has been hard hit by floods the past two years. Every county in this district has faced loss of life, homes and destruction of property. The most recent round of flooding hit western Sullivan, western Orange and eastern Ulster County hard. Entire villages were

underwater and the state response has been thus far abysmal. While this is an emergency management issue, it also relates back to environmental questions in the 42nd District.

Because of our unique position as the main water supply to nearly 10 million people, the 42nd District faces unique challenges. The current flooding is an example that we have to work harder on identifying solutions to storm water management and dedicate resources, such as the MS4 program that is required under federal statute. I believe that re-evaluating wetlands regulations must be part of that discussion because it is part of the solution to ending some of these environmental disasters in my district.