

PRESS RELEASE



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ASSEMBLY MEMBER BARBARA LIFTON RECEIVES TOP HONORS IN 2011 ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT CARD

ASSEMBLY MEMBER ADDIE RUSSELL EARNS HIGH MARKS IN GREEN VOTERS' GUIDE

(ALBANY, NY)— In the only scorecard that grades New York State lawmakers according to their votes on bills that could help or harm our air, land and water, today in the group's annual *Voters' Guide* EPL/Environmental Advocates honored Assembly member Barbara Lifton (D-Ithaca) as its 2011 "Legislator of the Year." The green honor is awarded to the public figure who has done the most to advance environmentally beneficial policy. Lifton received the award for her work to protect New York's waters and communities from industrial gas drilling by means of high volume hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." With the exception of Assembly member Addie Russell (D-Watertown), who received a respectable green score of 95 this year, lawmakers hailing from the North Country were on the receiving end of some of the environmental report card's lowest scores this year. EPL's *Voters' Guide* is New York's one-and-only scorecard that grades state lawmakers according to their votes on environmental bills. For the complete scorecard, visit www.eplvotersguide.org.

"Fracking is front and central in this year's environmental *Voters' Guide*, and our Legislator of the Year Assembly member Barbara Lifton distinguished herself by doing everything in her power to bring New Yorkers' concerns about industrial gas drilling to light. And while fracking may be a determining factor in next year's elections, it's not the only story in Albany. Thanks to Governor Cuomo and lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, New York has new laws on the books to reduce wasteful water withdrawals, make our streets more pedestrian friendly and establish a power plant siting process with robust community participation and green performance standards," said Robert Moore, executive director of EPL/Environmental Advocates. "This year's green *Voters' Guide* documents state leaders' steps forward—and attempts to roll back—New York's environmental protections."

Assembly member Lifton received the Legislator of the Year award for her work to protect New York's waters and communities from industrial gas drilling by means of high volume hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." She was the prime sponsor of a bill that would clarify local government authority over such drilling, and with a top score of 105, she cemented her legacy as one of New York's most committed

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environmental champions.

The 2011 *Voters’ Guide* awarded honorable mentions to longtime environmental hero Assembly member Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), Chair of the Assembly’s Environmental Conservation Committee, for his efforts to secure passage of the Water Resources Protection Act, which will protect state waters from wasteful withdrawals; Freshman Senator Mark Grisanti (R-Buffalo), for steering the water protection bill through the upper house; and Senator Charles Fuschillo (R-Massapequa), for serving as the driving force behind Complete Streets legislation this year.

New York State Senator Lee Zeldin (R- Hauppauge) earned this year’s “Oil Slick” award for his efforts to de-fund public transportation, which would result in service cuts and fare increases while discouraging the use of public transit. His bill was rated the dirtiest piece of legislation introduced in 2011, because it would worsen air quality and increase climate-altering pollution and traffic congestion. Thankfully, the legislation failed to receive an Assembly vote.

Although the executive branch is not scored in the *Voters’ Guide*, Governor Cuomo’s actions will have the most profound and lasting effect on the state’s environment. The Governor is currently poised to open New York State to fracking without the protections necessary to safeguard the health and safety of our water supplies or our communities. This ill-considered approach would sully his otherwise relatively “green” record. After years of cuts, his leadership kept the Environmental Protection Fund safe from harm during budget negotiations this year. However, Governor Cuomo’s next steps on fracking will cement his environmental legacy.

North Country Scores

Assembly

Kenneth D. Blankenbush (R-122/West Carthage)	42
Janet Duprey (R-114/Plattsburgh)	48
Addie Russell (D-118/Watertown)	95
Teresa R. Sayward (R-113/Glens Falls)	50

Senate

Elizabeth O’C Little (R-45/Glens Falls)	55
Joseph Griffo (R-47/Utica)	54
Patty Ritchie (R-48/Watertown)	54

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On average, Republican senators scored worse than their Democratic Party colleagues (57 to 83) in the environmental scorecard. Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos (R- Rockville Centre) received a score of 55 this year, while Minority Leader John Sampson (D-Brooklyn) earned an 85.

In the Assembly, Republican members scored a 62 on average, while their Democratic Party colleagues scored 101. Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-NYC) and Majority Leader Ron Canestrari (D-Albany) are among top scores with 102, and Minority Leader Brian Kolb (R-Geneva) received a 54.

Assembly member Robert Castelli (R-White Plains) saw the biggest score increase in 2011, from 76 to 101, while his colleague Bill Reilich (R-Rochester) saw his score decrease from 57 to 46. New York City senators Jose Serrano, Thomas Duane and Bill Perkins increased their scores to 99 from 85, while Senator Malcolm Smith (D-Hollis) score dropped precipitously from 79 to 56.

The Assembly passed four of the environmental community's five "Super Bills" in 2011. The Senate took up two of the priority bills; both were signed into law by Governor Cuomo. The Water Resources Protection Act will protect state waters from wasteful withdrawals. The Complete Streets law requires that transportation projects eligible for state and federal funding consider features that encourage walking, biking and public transit, thus reducing pollution. The passage of these two measures could have resulted in improved green grades for many members of the Senate majority. However, passage of eight bills deemed detrimental for New York's environment resulted in many failing grades in the upper house.

EPL/Environmental Advocates calculates lawmakers' scores using the ratings of its sister organization, Environmental Advocates of New York. Legislators earn between one and three points respectively for votes in support of bills that received one, two or three "trees." Tree-rated bills are those deemed beneficial to the environment. Likewise, legislators earn between one and three points for voting against bills that were give a rating of one, two or three "smokestacks." Smokestack-rated bills are those deemed detrimental to the environment. Votes on priority "Super Bills" are given extra weight in the guide.

The *Voters' Guide* is the first and only record of New York State lawmakers' votes on legislation that will impact the environment. The *Guide* has been produced and distributed statewide for more than 40 years.

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EPL/Environmental Advocates was founded in 1969 as one of the first organizations in the nation to advocate for the future of a state's environment and the health of its citizens. Through lobbying, advocacy, coalition building, citizen education and policy development, EPL/Environmental Advocates has been New York's environmental conscience—ensuring that environmental laws are enforced; that new measures are enacted when necessary; and that the public is informed of, and participates in, important environmental policy debates.