



SIERRA CLUB

TEHIPITE CHAPTER

An Introduction to the Sierra Club Political Program

The Sierra Club endorses candidates for elected office who support our Club's Conservation issues and our Club's mission, "to enjoy, explore, and protect the planet." The Club is comprised of 64 chapters, roughly 600,000 members and 500 staff, with an annual budget of \$140 million; it is complex, with many levels. In addition to the national Club, headquartered in Oakland, national field organizing staff operate in regional offices.

The Club has an extensive program to endorse and fund political candidates running for election for President, the Senate and Congress, state legislatures, governor and other candidates for statewide office, and local city councils and county supervisors. The national Club Political Committee and staff make the endorsement decision for President, while the national Club staff in Washington, D.C., decides which campaigns will receive our (precious) federal PAC money. Endorsements for the U.S. Congress and Senate, governor and other statewide races, state legislative races, and local government offices are made by the chapters. Funding for all California campaigns is raised by the Sierra Club California PAC, which hold its annual fundraiser each August, and spending decisions are made by our California chapter director.

There is one Club chapter for each state, plus D.C. and Puerto Rico, with the exception of California, which has thirteen chapters. Our Tehipite Chapter is all-volunteer and based in Fresno covering a four-county region: Fresno, Madera, Merced, and Mariposa. State-level endorsements for Governor and other statewide offices, are made by the Sierra Club California Political Committee.

In even-numbered election years, the Club runs its "Victory Corps" program, where approximately 50 Club staff are paid their usual salaries and reassigned to House and Senate candidate campaigns for the final three weeks of October. Following a campaign training, Club staff are assigned to a campaign's field (voter contact) program: managing phone banks, texting of voters, and knocking on doors to canvass targeted voters. In 2008, I was assigned by the Club to Albuquerque and Santa Fe for six weeks. Our talented team of four persuaded Sierra Club members to volunteer for the Congressional campaigns of Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján (today they are New Mexico's Senators). With experience in campaign organizing, I was assigned to a team six weeks prior to the November election.

In election years our Tehipite Chapter evaluates candidates for elected office starting in January or March for the Primary election, and starting in July for the November election. We first decide which races to consider endorsements for. Where there are one or more candidates with a record of supporting our issues, we invite all candidates from the two major parties, plus other candidates with an organized campaign to invite into the endorsement process. Where political districts cross chapter boundaries, we partner with a neighboring Club chapter to conduct the endorsement.

To summarize the endorsement process: we first send each candidate an invitation to participate and a written questionnaire to complete. At the same time, our chapter Political Chair recruits a pool of volunteers to participate in interview teams. An interview date for a specific election is set, and candidate questionnaires are returned, The Team is briefed on the procedures used to decide endorsements, based on a 200-page Club manual, which includes the law and Club rules governing campaign funding. We then interview the candidates one at a time, back-to-back. Immediately following these, the interview team discusses the merits of the candidates and, if any are acceptable, selects one for endorsement. Following the vote, the endorsement, along with accompanying documentation justifying the endorsement, is emailed to a Candidate Review Committee of Sierra Club California for final review, to ensure that Sierra Club endorsement rules were followed.

The Club endorsement process is strictly non-partisan. Sometimes we're accused of being "owned" by the Democratic Party, but the reality is that *the Club will support any candidate with a track record of supporting our positions on important environmental issues*. Twenty years ago, a careful look at voting records could find the rare Republican with a 25% voting record; climate change was not yet a political football. Today, as the oil industry, the Koch Brothers, and the MAGA movement have tightened their grip on Republican politicians, "moderate" Republicans who are willing to acknowledge human-exacerbated climate change appear to have gone extinct. Nonetheless, the Sierra Club works to find candidates outside the Democratic Party who share our environmental values.

How to get involved: our Tehipite Chapter will begin in early August the endorsement process for the November election. If you are interested in participating on an interview team, contact Gary Lasky at 559-790-3495 or garylaskylaw@gmail.com. Non-Club members are welcome to join the Club and participate.