

# L.A. Parker: Sierra Club jab delivers baseless ‘homophobic’ accusation



The New Jersey Sierra Club endorsed Reed Gusciora for mayor of Trenton. Submitted Photo

By [L.A. Parker](#), *The Trentonian*

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One story begging for airspace regarding the 2018 Trenton election involves an endorsement by the New Jersey Sierra Club for now Mayor-elect Reed Gusciora.

The April support for Gusciora, openly gay and rightfully proud, arrived in April with this press statement.

“We are endorsing Reed because he has worked hard for the environment. We believe he will help improve urban areas for cleaner drinking water, especially in schools where lead is in children’s drinking water. Reed will take on the illegal trash dumping problems in Trenton while making the city the greenest in the country”, said Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.

“We believe Reed will make Trenton more resilient deal with issues by increasing the city’s clean energy infrastructure. He will move the city towards 100% renewable and move it into the 21st century. He will fight for Trenton’s environment, public health, and economy and we believe he is the best candidate for Mayor of Trenton.”

Pressed about the appearance of the Sierra Club's foray into Trenton politics, an inquiry that seemed noteworthy considering that the environmental preservation organization had avoided previous endorsements of any minority city mayoral candidate, Tittel delivered a jugular assault.

"One might say that you're being homophobic?," Tittel responded, after hearing dismay about the Sierra Club's first-time endorsement of a substantive white mayoral candidate.

An endorsement never surfaced for former Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer, whose administration started the city's run on seven Phoenix Awards, dispensed to cities involved in remediation of brown fields.

A Phoenix Award recognizes successful efforts to turn contaminated properties into successful environmentally friendly projects.

In 2015, Trenton claimed a seventh Phoenix Award — more than any other in the U.S. — for transformation of an contaminated industrial wasteland on East State St. into a new park and housing development.

In environmental circles, Phoenix Awards hold as much significance as winning an Academy Award. The New Jersey Sierra Club overlooked Trenton's successful environmental projects for petty politics.

"The organization had some personal issues with Mayor Palmer," Tittel noted.

Sierra Club members disagreed with a Palmer push for the Route 29 Tunnel and construction of Waterfront Park, a professional baseball stadium built in 1994.

The joint Mercer County and City of Trenton project overlooks the Delaware River. Both projects impacted land and ecosystems adjacent to the river.

Tittel explained his organization received questionnaires from only two of the original seven mayoral candidates then made a decision to support Gusciora.

Aaron Mair, the first African American to be elected Sierra Club president in 2015, helped move his organization toward an understanding that environmental concerns and racial justice connect.

Terrell Mwetta, an editorial intern in the Sierra Club's Communications Department, wrote Mair, who ended his two-year term in May 2017, "sees the causes of environmental protection and racial equality as intertwined, and he's passionate about unifying the two."

"If one is going to be an environmentalist in the 21st century, one has to be a human rights activist," Mair offered.

"People say, 'well, that's social justice, that has nothing to do with environmentalism.' That's bullshit!"

A similar observation exists for Tittel's "homophobic" assertion. Questions about Sierra Club policy and procedure, the Sierra Club president moved the conversation toward Gusciora and fear mongering.

Tittel should know that a personal Twitter post, offered before Gusciora made public his Trenton mayoral hopes, suggested the assemblyman should consider a run for the city's top government position.

Founded in May 1892, in San Francisco, California, by the Scottish-American preservationist John Muir, who became its first president, the Sierra Club needed nearly 125 years to select a black man as president.

Tittel deserves credit for moving the Sierra Club's office to Trenton although some organization projects fail to engage minority citizens.

Personally, a love for environment, especially trees, water and air, developed during early childhood romps into Winslow Township, Camden County pine lands.

Moving forward, time remains an essential matter of life, as hours should not be wasted on personal grudges and lackluster assertions.

Residents on Franklin St. could use a newly planted tree in the middle of our block. Mr. Tittel or any other Sierra Club member have an open invitation to deliver and help plant that tree.

Call the invitation an olive branch as Trenton residents engage in the cultivation of ideas, dreams and success.

*L.A. Parker is a Trentonian columnist.*