

**Quick ID!** Last Name: Choske House/Senate District Sought: HD-6 Party Affiliation: Democrat

February 14, 2018

Dear Candidate,

The Sierra Club Michigan Chapter is one of our state's largest and most influential non-partisan environmental organizations. We represent approximately 130,000 members and supporters throughout Michigan.

The Sierra Club Michigan Chapter endorses candidates that we believe will support environmental protection and those who strive to be leaders in developing strong pro-environmental policies. A Sierra Club endorsement comes with resources that will help your campaign such as: doing a press announcement of the endorsement; communicating with our members about your candidacy; the ability to use our name and endorsement seal in your campaign materials; the option to buy a one-time only set of mailing labels for all of our members in your district. If your race is a priority for our Political Program, you may also receive additional resources such as: loaning your campaign a political intern; recruiting SC members to volunteer for your campaign; or a PAC donation.



We encourage you to submit your responses to our brief questionnaire (below) to be considered for endorsement by our organization. There are eight sections. Optional background information is included for each issue and the questions are highlighted in **bold**.

Please be sure to detail your answers where requested. Your reasoning behind your positions is important to us. Questionnaires are for internal Sierra Club use – we do not release questionnaire responses to the public.

The deadline for returning your endorsement questionnaire to be eligible for endorsement before the primary election is: May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018 at noon. The deadline to be eligible for our round of endorsements after the primary election is: August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at noon. Questionnaires received after August 17<sup>th</sup> will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Please submit your completed questionnaire via E-mail to [mike.berkowitz@sierraclub.org](mailto:mike.berkowitz@sierraclub.org). DO NOT mail or fax in your questionnaire. We are only accepting questionnaire responses via E-mail. Please submit this in one of the following formats: MS Word, Google doc, PDF, scanned image, or in the text of an email.

If you have questions about our endorsement process, please contact:

Mike Berkowitz, Sierra Club Michigan Chapter Political Director at [mike.berkowitz@sierraclub.org](mailto:mike.berkowitz@sierraclub.org) or 517-999-1305.

Mike will send you a confirmation E-mail when your questionnaire is received. If you send in your questionnaire and don't get a confirmation within 3 days, please alert us as soon as possible.

We look forward to hearing from you. Good luck with your campaign!

Sincerely,

Richard Morley Barron, Sierra Club Michigan Chapter Political Chair  
Mike Berkowitz, Sierra Club Michigan Chapter Political Director

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**2018**

Endorsement Questionnaire for Michigan House of Representatives and Senate

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(Please also put this information into the header for our Quick ID)

Candidate Name: **Tom Choske**

Office Sought and House/Senate District Number: **State House – District 6**

Party Affiliation: **Democrat**

Are you a Sierra Club member? **Yes**

Campaign Committee Name: **Tom Choske For Representative**

Address/Zip: **1538 Centre St, Unit 605, Detroit MI 48226**

Phone: **(313) 288-8662**

E-mail: **Tom@VoteChoske.com**

Campaign Website: **VoteChoske.com**

Facebook page:

Twitter handle: **@TomChoske**

Contact person (someone other than the candidate): **Mawj Mohammed**

Name of individual completing this questionnaire: **Tom Choske**

*The Sierra Club is interested in the reasons behind your positions. Please provide as much detail as possible.*

## 1. PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

**Please give a brief biography outlining relevant experience, public offices held, involvement in environmental causes, and membership in any environmental organizations. You are also welcome to submit your biography as a separate document with this questionnaire if that is easier for you.**

On separate sheet at end of document

## 2. PERSONAL PRIORITIES

### **A) Please identify your top environmental concerns, and what you would like to do as a member of the legislature to address those concerns:**

Our environment is our most precious resource and must be protected. I will be a staunch defender of our waters, our air, and our land. I'll work in Lansing to ensure that everyone in our state can be sure that neither their air, water, or land will make them sick, and that our waterways are protected from corporate greed. It's up to us to ensure that Michigan's state motto remains true for generations to come: "if you seek a beautiful peninsula, look around you".

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- Access to clean, safe, and affordable water is a right. I will fight to restore water quality throughout the state and to ensure water rates are affordable for all residents. No one should ever face a shut off and Tom will help to bring the number of homes without water to zero.
- I will continue to fight against polluters like Marathon and AK Steel, who seek corporate welfare at the expense of our community. I will build on my track-record of holding polluters accountable to the community and helping those impacted by pollution seek damages, as I did working in the State Senate and with Congressman Hansen Clarke.
- I will join with fellow Democrats to ensure that a citizen's oversight commission is created over the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), so that a tragedy like the Flint Water Crisis can never be swept under the rug again.
- I will work to find ways to prevent the expansion of US Ecology's facility and to force them to clean up the damage they've already caused in our neighborhoods.
- I will push to ensure that Nestle pays its fair share to extract Michigan drinking water and sell it to out-of-state customers.
- I will support common-sense measure to protect residents from industrial pollutants by requiring corporations to install natural barriers or offer above-market payments to nearby homeowners to buy them out of their properties.
- I will fight against hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, calling for an immediate ban on the practice and requiring all companies who have fracked to disclose exactly what chemical solutions were pumped into our ground.
- I believe that Enbridge Line 5, an aging oil pipeline under the Mackinac Straits, is a clear and present danger to all Michigan citizens and must be immediately and safely shut down. I will be proud to bring together a coalition to close the pipeline and hold Enbridge accountable for its environmental damage.
- I will work to help improve energy efficiency to drive down energy costs and reduce pollution through funding weatherization tax credits for businesses & individuals, while partnering with organizations like Young Detroit Builders to ensure that our neighbors and children are the ones hired for these jobs.
- I will fight to bring more jobs to our community while improving our environment through making Michigan a leader in recycling technologies. I will work to make curbside recycling universal while bringing advanced single-stream recycling facilities to the area. I will also work to promote recycling of plastic bottles and bags through expanding deposit programs and enabling localities to levy fees on bags at stores.

**B) Please describe your environmental achievement(s) and/or your actions which you believe have had the most impact on protecting the environment:**

In my time as a legislative staffer, I worked on passage of the Great Lakes, Great Michigan initiative, Michigan's first Renewable Portfolio Standard for energy production, and for a law to protect our families from lead poisoning. In Congress, I worked with Rep. Hansen Clarke to protect money for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative that was under threat. I've worked to ensure that residents are protected from the issues related to development in our city, such as supporting a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) to protect residents from environmental damage caused by the construction of a new bridge to Canada, and also working with the community to get justice for residents whose homes were made unlivable due to pollution from Marathon's Detroit refinery.

**C) As of the date of submission of this questionnaire, what are your campaign's fundraising and voter contact goals? How much progress have you made toward accomplishing these goals so far?**

Our campaign has made great progress towards reaching our goals. We're on-track from a fundraising standpoint, with more than half the money we'll need. We're also active on the ground,

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### 3. GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

Right now there are many signs that our lakes are endangered: toxic chemicals, large algae blooms, invasive species, agricultural wastes dumped in waterways, proliferation of shoreline development, disappearing habitats for wildlife, and weakened wetland protections. The Great Lakes are also threatened by aging pipelines and new pipeline proposals. When the Lakes are unhealthy, it is a drain on our economy and it means fewer jobs for the region, especially Michigan. Just as concerning, unhealthy lakes mean fewer people can enjoy our beaches, our fishing, our waterways and the clean, affordable drinking water upon which we rely.

**A) Do you support keeping oil out of the Great Lakes, including decommissioning Enbridge's Line 5 pipelines in the Straits of Mackinac?**

Yes

Don't know

No

**Explain:** Line 5 should be quickly and safely shut down while alternative solutions for fuel transportation across the strait are made.

**B) Although there are alternatives to continuing the risky practice of transporting oil in the Great Lakes, Gov. Snyder has prioritized studying replacing Line 5 in the Straits with new oil pipelines, potentially with tunnels or by trenching bottomlands. Do you oppose replacing Line 5 with new oil pipelines?**

Yes

Don't know

No

**Explain:** Pipelines carry inherent risks and should be nowhere near the Great Lakes Basin, home to 20% of the planet's freshwater reserves. Further, Enbridge has proven to be horribly incompetent in maintaining its existing pipeline infrastructure, as emphasized by the 2010 Line 6B disaster outside of Kalamazoo that still has not been remediated.

**C) Will you support legislation aimed at reducing agricultural nutrient runoff which leads to toxic algae blooms in the Great Lakes? This includes banning the application of livestock manure/waste and chemical fertilizers on frozen or snow-covered ground. This also includes reducing the agronomic rate for phosphorus from manure applications to match the rate recommended for other forms of phosphorus fertilizer.**

Yes

Don't know

No

**Explain:** Non-point source pollution is an area of water protection that must be strengthened. I believe that state assistance to programs like MSU Extension and providing incentives to farmers can shift us towards more organic-based, biodegradable nutrients. State regulation for the storage and treatment of farm waste products should be improved, mandating stronger protections from runoff and groundwater seepage.

### 4. CLEAN ENERGY

Fossil fuel-based energy production (such as coal and natural gas) is a major cause of air pollution and global climate change. In order to address this, the Sierra Club proposes replacing fossil fuels with clean and renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and efficiency.

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**A) Do you support requiring Michigan’s utility companies to invest in at least 1.5% additional renewable energy on an annual basis?**

Yes

Don’t know

No

**Explain:** When I worked in the State Senate as a staffer, I was proud to help pass through the first Renewable Portfolio Standard for our state. I will continue to push to improve this, and I will also be an advocate for “30 by 30”, requiring 30% of generation come from renewables by 2030.

**B) Do you support requiring Michigan’s utility companies to achieve at least a 2% annual increase in energy efficiency?**

Yes

Don’t know

No

**Explain:** One of the most immediate solutions to reduce the harmful environmental impacts of energy generation is to use less energy. By implementing state policies that encourage companies to adopt more efficient technologies in the realms of power generation and transmission, our state can reduce wasted energy, reduce the drain on natural resources, and reduce the harmful emissions caused by power generation.

## 5. HYDRAULIC FRACTURING FOR NATURAL GAS

High volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is a controversial process for extracting natural gas that has caused groundwater contamination and geologic instability in several parts of the country. In this process, millions of gallons of water, laced with thousands of gallons of chemicals, are pumped down a well to blast open tight rock fissures to access gas deposits as deep as 10,000 feet. The Sierra Club Michigan Chapter is calling for Michigan to ban fracking and implement strong safeguards for people, public health, and water quality. The electric utility industry is using the retirement of coal-burning power plants as an excuse to increase our country’s dependence on unsustainable natural gas power plants, instead of maximizing efficiency and renewable power. Overproduction of natural gas across the country (despite a lack of demand) has driven the expansion of pipelines into and throughout Michigan, which are disrupting local communities and increasing our dependence on fossil fuels.

**A) Do you support a ban on fracking in Michigan?**

Yes

Don’t know

No

**Explain:** Hydraulic fracturing is a dangerous process whose full impact on the environment has not been fully studied. I believe that there needs to be a moratorium on all future fracking operations and that all current operations should be halted while a thorough, impartial analysis is conducted.

**B) If fracking is not banned, do you support enacting strict regulations on fracking in order to protect public health and Michigan’s Great Lakes/inland waters?**

Yes

Don’t know

No

**Explain:** The fracking industry is one of the least regulated energy industries in the country. I believe that there should be strict oversight on discharge procedures & waste water

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**C) Will you advocate for Michigan to focus on increasing renewable energy investments instead of natural gas?**

Yes

Don't know

No

**Explain:** Natural gas is not a renewable source of energy, and while it produces less particulate pollution than other fossil fuels, it is not clean and not sustainable. I don't believe that natural gas is needed as a 'bridge' to clean, renewable, and sustainable alternatives as is sometimes argued; with a variety of production methods, including solar (both photovoltaic and 'molten salt' arrays), wind, and geothermal, utilities and consumers can achieve consistent power generation no matter the weather. Furthermore, recent improvements in battery storage technology have made it possible to build in further redundancy to the grid and to better normalize delivery across different loads.

## 6. PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRACY

Current state lawmakers are making it harder for individuals to vote and increasing the role of money in politics while decreasing political campaign finance transparency. Lawmakers also design their legislative district boundaries in a partisan way that undermines public confidence in government and reduces accountability. These actions make it harder to achieve conservation victories through the state Legislature and, in many cases, create barriers to voter participation, particularly among elderly and low-income voters. Sierra Club has endorsed the proposed Voters Not Politicians ballot measure to establish an Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission.

**A) As a State Legislator, will you encourage more voter participation and support campaign finance reform? This includes proposals such as no-excuse absentee voter registration, early voting in Michigan, Election Day voter registration, and complete disclosure of all political campaign expenditures by for-profit and non-profit corporations and all political action committees, including those making independent expenditures?**

Yes

Don't know

No

**Explain:** Big money politics have ruined the lives of many people in my district. Special interest lobbyists are the direct cause of many of our environmental problems in the region and I believe we need to return the power to the people. I will strongly push to shift Michigan from our current, broken system to one of public campaign funding.

**B) Will you support an Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission to reform the way Michigan draws legislative districts to end partisan gerrymandering/redistricting?**

Yes

Don't know

No

**Explain:** Having been directly involved in the 2011-2012 round of redistricting of legislative seats in Michigan, I know how politicized the process is and how it works to disenfranchise voters. I support redistricting reforms, including a citizen's redistricting council and am a proud signatory of the Voters Not Politicians drive.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice is defined as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. The Sierra Club is committed to environmental justice principles and working against injustices such as the Flint water crisis and the 48217 toxic air pollution problem. In Michigan, ensuring the right of all people to clean, affordable drinking water is a major environmental justice issue.

**As a state legislator, what measures would you take to ensure drinking water quality for all? What solutions would you propose to guarantee drinking water access and affordability for all?**

My district includes the 48217 Zip Code, America's most polluted area. Environmental justice isn't just phrase for our district: it's the number one thing we fight for.

As it relates to drinking water, I believe and will work to ensure it is enshrined as a legal right of all Michigan citizens. Should it not pass in this legislative session, I will reintroduce the water affordability legislation that Rep. Chang and other members have authored to ensure that our people have access to water and do not have to fear shut-offs. I will also stand firm to ensure that DEQ regulations are able to be reviewed by a citizen's oversight committee, so that the people have assurances their voices are heard in permitting decisions.

## 8. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change is the #1 priority issue for the Sierra Club because it is the largest environmental threat we've ever faced and it impacts every aspect of life. Human contribution to climate change is widely accepted among the world's leading scientists and governments. Immediate and dramatic coordinated governmental action to mitigate this global menace needs to happen at all levels of government.

**Indicate in detail your understanding of the seriousness of climate change and what you believe the Michigan Legislature should do about it.**

I believe that global climate change is the greatest threat facing not only our state, but our planet. I also support the multitude of scientists who have conclusively shown that human-generated carbon emissions are the lead drivers of this change. If global temperatures continue to rise, Michigan will be directly threatened with water shortages that could destroy our environment and economy. Some residents in my district already face difficult summers and need to use cooling centers, while others can't afford to heat their homes and have to suffer extreme winters.

To combat climate change, Michigan must become a leader in green energy generation and energy efficiency. To do this, we must set higher targets for our Renewable Portfolio Standards and require that utilities use the most efficient equipment possible in power generation and transmission to reduce loss. I support policies that will help homeowners and businesses weatherize their properties to reduce their energy footprint. I also believe that the government should partner with educational institutions and industries to help usher new energy-efficient transit solutions to people and increase funding for public transit projects.

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**Has the candidate personally approved the responses given in this questionnaire?**

Yes

No

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Good luck with your campaign!*

### **Candidate Biography**

A Detroit and Democratic candidate for the 6th State House District, Tom's career has been focused around helping the city he loves. He began his passion for public service by working in the Michigan State House and State Senate as well as in the Lansing office of former U.S. Senator Carl Levin. He also spent time overseas, interning with the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service in Berlin, Germany. Tom then served with Congressman Hansen Clarke's district staff in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Tom has embraced entrepreneurship and become active in the startup scene. He was co-founder of Freshwater Transit Solutions (renamed Powerful), a public engagement services firm, and serves as a partner in LoveLifeSwagger – a local fashion company. Through his consulting company, Choske Consulting, he teaches classes on digital marketing at Grand Circus Detroit and helps other entrepreneurs grow.

He is very active in the community, serving as a precinct delegate. A life-long Democrat, Tom is also an active member in the Democratic party, having served on the MDP State Central Committee, the MDP Resolution Committee, and as a member (and former Secretary) of the Young Democrats of Michigan. He also is a co-founder and board member of PartnershipUs, a local non-profit that helps to empower youth in the community and fight illiteracy through innovative programs such as Literacy Through Letter. His Political Action Committee, Detroiters Vote, seeks to help give Detroit citizens a greater voice in how their government is run.

Tom graduated from the James Madison College of Public Policy at Michigan State University and earned a Masters in Business Administration at the University of Michigan.

Tom is proud to serve his community. He is a board member of:

- PartnershipUs (Co-Founder and Board Member)
- Detroiters Vote (Treasurer)

Tom is also on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the M1-RAIL team, helping to advocate for inclusive developments in transit throughout the area.

Tom has been a lifelong Democrat, serving as:

- Precinct Delegate – Precinct 157, Detroit
- 13th District Democratic Party Organization – State Central Committee Delegate
- 13th District Democratic Party Organization – Communications Committee Chair
- At-Large Board Member, Young Democrats of Detroit

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Tom is a member in good standing of:

- Detroit Economic Club
- Detroit Young Professionals
- 13th Congressional District Democratic Party
- Young Democrats of Michigan
- Michigan Democratic Party
- Michigan State University Alumni Association
- James Madison College Alumni Association
- Transportation Riders United (TRU)
- Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan
- NAACP
- Detroit RiverFront Conservancy and Riv28
- Sierra Club
- American Civil Liberties Union

In volunteering his time to assist those in need, Tom serves at:

- Adopt-A-Child Christmas
- Gleaner's Community Foodbank
- Forgotten Harvest Foodbank
- Focus:HOPE Foodbank
- Life Remodeled
- PartnershipUs
- Michigan Youth In Government
- Stephen Siller Tunnel To Towers Foundation – Building For America's Bravest
- Detroit Economic Club – Young Leader's Career Readiness program

Tom also participates in events to raise awareness and help solve issues such as veteran homelessness, Multiple Sclerosis, and to advance cancer research, such as:

- Komen Race For The Cure
- American Lung Association Fight For Air Climb
- MS Society MuckFest MS
- Wounded Warriors Foundation – Tough Mudder
- Operation Gratitude – Merrell Down and Dirty Race

Some of Tom's previous roles were:

- Detroit Brownfield Redevelopment Authority – Community Advisory Committee Board Member
- Secretary of the Young Democrats of Michigan 2009-2011
- Columnist for The State News 2007-2008
- Adviser to Spartans For Obama 2008
- President of Spartans for Progressive Divestment 2008
- President of Spartans for Richardson 2007
- Detroit Young Professionals Leadership Team 2013