



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lea Webb

Senator Webb Celebrates Earth Month by Recognizing Environmental Stewards and Champions of Sustainability from Across Senate District 52

LEA WEBB May 23, 2025

| ISSUE: **ENVIRONMENTAL**



(Binghamton, NY) – Today, Senator Lea Webb hosted her second annual Earth Month Reception at the State Office Building in Binghamton, where she honored a distinguished group of individuals and organizations for their unwavering dedication to sustainability and environmental stewardship. The event recognized those who have made significant contributions to combating climate change, advancing sustainable agricultural practices, and

addressing food insecurity within the community. In addition, Senator Webb recognized students from across the district who submitted entries for the 2025 Earth Day Poster Contest Celebration. This year's theme, "Our Power, Our Planet," focused on the importance of recycling and waste reduction.

Awards and recognitions were presented to:

- **Dr. Aloja Airewele, Program Leader of the Energy Warriors program at Cornell Cooperative Extension-Tompkins County;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **The late Dr. Richard "Dick" Andrus, Professor at Binghamton University and trained Botanist;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **Dr. Peter Bardaglio, Coordinator of the Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative/ Executive Director of the Ithaca 2030 District;** *New York State Senate Proclamation Award Recipient*
- **Kate Downes, Program Manager at Seven Valleys Health Coalition;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **Christina Fuller, Founder of the Move Out Project;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **Bob Haight, President/CEO of the Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **Chris Harasta, Sustainability Manager for Binghamton University Dining Services and the Volunteer Coordinator with the Binghamton Move Out Project;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **Tshijuka Nelson, Youth Program Manager at VINES (Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments);** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*
- **Jay Smith, Urban Environmentalist;** *New York State Senate Commendation Award Recipient*

Binghamton High School

- Samantha Francilus

Chenango Forks Middle School:

- Layla Laine

Chenango Forks High School:

- Michael Giovenco

Dewitt Middle School:

- Venba Rajnish

Dryden Elementary School:

- Finnian Fletcher
- Arjen Dymond
- Eli Gibbs
- Ava Isenberg

Homer Brink Elementary School:

- Ava Isenberg
- Isaiah Scott
- Ava Wilber
- Lylet Nelson
- Emma Appleman
- Macklin Pomeroy
- Emerson Koniuto

- Matthew McDonald
- Genevieve Khounkaseum
- Thomas Repetto
- Abigail Signorelli
- Grady Simek
- Unity Kuzda
- Ahian Roman Roman
- Hayden Dickstein
- Audrina Hores
- Heleena Rizzo

Russel I. Doig Middle School:

- Rowan Battles

Vestal Hills Elementary School:

- Ara Kradjian
- Olivia Sanders

“As we celebrate Earth Month, I’m proud to recognize the dedicated individuals, organizations, and advocates across our region who are committed to promoting sustainability and protecting our environment,” **said Senator Lea Webb.** “Their efforts to reduce waste, promote clean energy, and advance sustainable practices are essential to the health of our communities and our planet. I’m especially inspired by the students from across the district who participated in the Senate’s Earth Day Poster Celebration. Their

creativity and enthusiasm for environmental stewardship give us hope for a brighter, greener future. Together, we're building a culture of sustainability that benefits both current and future generations."

Quotes in alphabetical order:

"The task of preparing our communities to be climate resilient, demands that we bring people into the workforce who have the knowledge, tools and commitment to explore dignified career pathways in the clean energy sector," **said Dr. Aloja Airewele**. "These are individuals who understand that we have no spare planet and that there are no disposable people. Making our communities climate resilient was the work of yesterday, it is the work of today and will be the work of tomorrow".

Said Dr. Peter Bardaglio, "I am very honored to receive this award from Senator Webb, especially in the company of so many accomplished individuals committed to sustainability, climate justice, and environmental stewardship. Now more than ever we need to work together at the local and state levels to advocate for policies and actions that will accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy and strengthen the climate resiliency of our communities. As a longtime resident of the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes, I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to collaborate with so many dedicated and hardworking activists and leaders to help build a more secure and equitable future for our children and grandchildren. I hope that my work with the Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative, Ithaca 2030 District, New Roots Charter School, Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming, PRI/Museum of the Earth, and EcoVillage at Ithaca, Inc. have contributed in some small measure to the betterment of life in our region."

Said Kate Downes, "As someone who works in rural health everyday being recognized by Sen. Webb is deeply humbling, and an incredible honor. I do this work to empower people in my

community to live healthy and fulfilling lives – and if I can make that a little bit easier by providing fresh, locally grown veggies, or with doula support, then that’s even better. As someone who grew up in rural Northern NY, I understand how challenging it can be to live in these beautiful, yet remote places, where access to food and healthcare and other necessities is limited. Now, living here in Cortland County, it’s a remarkable honor to deepen my connection with my neighbors, building a community that is vibrant, supportive, and caring for all people, and for the future.”

“It is an honor to be recognized with a Commendation Award from Senator Lea Webb,” **said Christina Fuller**. “The Move Out Project was born out of a shared passion for sustainability and giving back to the community, and I am so proud of what our team has accomplished over the last seven years. Congratulations to all the fellow awardees; your commitment to environmentalism inspires me every day.”

“I’m honored to accept this award on behalf of myself and the hardworking, dedicated team I have the pleasure of working with at the Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce,” **said Bob Haight**. “Our work in Early Childhood Education, Workforce Development, Housing, and DEI is designed to have a positive impact on our business community and our community at large. I thank Senator Webb for partnering with us on this important work and especially for her leadership and support of our work to create a sustainable Early Childhood Education pilot. We look forward to implementing a pilot to show that investing in early education pays off for all stakeholders. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else than right here, right now.”

Said Chris Harasta, “If we want to do business in a thriving world, then we need to ensure that the whole world thrives with us.”

Said Tshijuka Nelson, “Our children are the most precious part of the world. We should do everything we can for them right now so that they are prepared for the tomorrow they are inheriting from us.”

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