

2009 NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

Citizens Union, as part of its historic effort to promote good government and political reform in the City of New York, is committed to ensuring fair elections, clean campaigns, and open, effective government that is accountable to the citizens of New York. While our city elected officials have taken laudable action in this direction in recent years, there is more work to be done not only in the area of structural reform, but also on key public policies.

Citizens Union in 2009 will continue to engage New Yorkers, our elected officials, and other decision-makers to reform our election administration system and laws to ensure that elections are conducted in a way that enfranchises voters and encourages competitive contests. Citizens Union will work to create a more responsive, transparent and accountable city government that not only protects the public interest, but also instills public confidence in the integrity and even-handedness of the public policy decisions that are being made.

Our work will include efforts to evaluate the form and function of city governance with regard to the historic charter changes enacted twenty years ago in 1989; ensure the selection of a secure, accurate, and accessible new voting system; bring greater public oversight to police conduct and confidence in the handling of incidents of misconduct; monitor the effectiveness of the recent lobbying and campaign finance laws; evaluate the effectiveness of mayoral control of city schools; advance effective citizen participation in land use decisions; evaluate potential funding sources for much needed transportation and infrastructure improvements; and establish greater accountability and oversight of city government and its decisions.

Citizens Union is committed to ensuring that the following measures are implemented by the appropriate branches of government, city agencies and public entities to meet the goals outlined above. Some agenda items below are those which Citizens Union will advance while others are those which it will ask city or state government to address.

ELECTION REFORM

- Ensure that the current Board of Elections in the City of New York is more accountable and transparent by advocating for timely release of required annual post-election reports; inclusion in the preliminary and final versions of the Mayor's Management Report; and providing additional public disclosure of City Board meetings, including webcasting of city board meetings, operations, and election statistics.
- Urge the City Board to increase access to voting information through the execution of an expansive public outreach and education campaign, and innovative use of their existing website and phone hotline.
- Work to establish a new governance structure for administering local elections that is more accountable and transparent in its obligations and operations.
- Ensure that the testing and selection of new voting machines for the City of New York is not compromised and proceeds in a transparent manner in accordance with the high standards established by the state to ensure voting systems are secure, accurate, and accessible as required by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), the Election Reform and Modernization Act of 2005, and the voting system standards established by the State Board of Elections pursuant to ERMA; to the extent that the City Board is unable to test, select and implement new voting systems during the 2009 election cycle, the City Board should adopt a contingency plan for usage of existing voting systems that includes a more comprehensive public education component on the current ballot marking devices.
- Develop an extensive public education program to prepare specifically for the shift to new voting machines to familiarize voters with the new processes and technology before Election Day.
- Expand training and recruitment of poll workers to ensure that there is an adequate number of workers, all of whom are capable of performing their required tasks; training must reflect sensitivity to non-English speaking and disabled voters, as well as comprehensive information on the new voting system that is ultimately selected for the city and current ballot marking devices, and must emphasize the revised poll site procedures, including provisional ballot requirements, required under HAVA.
- Urge the City to increase the base pay for those serving as poll workers on the day of the election.
- Urge the City to work in conjunction with the City Board to make necessary improvements to the voting system storage facilities to accommodate the new computerized voting systems that the City Board will ultimately acquire.

(continued on reverse)

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Curb the outlay of public funds** to candidates facing minimal opposition.
- **Lower campaign contribution limits** to levels equal to or below those for candidates for federal office.
- **Establish a more stringent “war chest” restriction** to limit the transfer of funds raised in one race for use in another.
- **Monitor the implementation of the campaign finance doing business contribution restrictions** with an eye towards potential campaign finance reform after the 2009 citywide elections.

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- Provide **greater access to hearing transcripts, witness testimony and briefing papers, and improve webcasting of council hearings.**
- Create stronger and **more independent council committees** by empowering all committee chairs to set their own agendas, schedule votes, and participate in the hiring and firing decisions for committee staff.
- **Reduce the number of council committees** and redistribute their roles and responsibilities for greater effectiveness and efficiency so council members are not spread too thin across too many committees.
- Ensure a more **equitable distribution of council resources** to each council member and their respective district that is not based on political considerations.
- Create a **more active role** for City Council members, committees, and the public in the **budget review process.**
- **Restrict stipend allocations** for committee chairs and leadership positions and require greater financial disclosure by those who earn income outside of their council positions.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE and FUNCTIONING

- Examine the **effectiveness of city government**, the execution of its responsibilities through its charter mandated offices and agencies, and the balance of power among the branches of government and elected offices in a **review of the major restructuring of government in the late 1980’s.**
- Seek the appointment of a diverse and **independent charter revision commission**, which includes, but is not limited to, racial, gender and geographic diversity in appointments made by the various branches of city government and charge it with soliciting meaningful public input as it thoroughly reviews the entirety of the New York city charter and city government function.

- **Evaluate the impact of term limits on the functioning of city government** and make whatever changes may be necessary in light of the knowledge gained from the eight-year experience of term limits.
- **Improve access to city agency administrative proceedings,** including webcasting of hearings and public meetings.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

- Ensure that there is **sufficient oversight and effective adjudication in the handling of claims of police misconduct** that instills public confidence in the process and the city’s police force, including a specific effort to transfer prosecutorial power over substantiated claims of police misconduct to the Civilian Complaint Review Board.
- **Assess alternative funding sources for much needed transportation and infrastructure improvements** by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to ensure the allocation of costs for the public transportation system are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.
- Ensure **proper public participation, accountability and transparency** in zoning and land use planning decisions that addresses the interests of local communities while supporting the economic development needs of the city.
- Evaluate the **effectiveness of the current governance structure for public education, specifically how the Mayor has exercised control in managing the city’s school system** in the context of democratic participation, effective governance, accountability, results, and transparency of operations.
- Ensure **effective and active functioning** of charter mandated agencies to facilitate greater public access to city information, including the **Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC).**
- Restore the quadrennial cycle of **elected official compensation review.**
- Ensure the appointment of a **commission to study the effectiveness of the lobbying reform bills passed in 2006.**
- **Reduce the prevalence of local laws creating non-functioning or non-appointed task forces or commissions.**