



CITIZENS UNION

2015 NEW YORK STATE and NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. We serve as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform in pursuit of fair elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public. In 2015 Citizens Union will focus on opening up elections to more New Yorkers, and addressing low voter turnout. We will continue to hold elected officials accountable to ensure greater public confidence in government. Presented are Citizens Union's 2015 policy issues for New York City and State.

NEW YORK STATE POLICY AGENDA

ETHICS REFORM

- Increase disclosure, reduce conflicts of interest and **limit outside income** earned by state legislators.
- Ensure that the Joint Commission on Public Ethics **enforces** newly enacted **oversight rules**, and require more **disclosure of decision-making** by the Commission.
- Empower the Attorney General to **investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption**.
- Amend the state constitution to **extend pension forfeiture**, subject to due process safeguards, to **public officers and elected officials who have been convicted of felonies**.

ELECTION REFORM

- **Increase voter participation** with early voting, Election Day voter registration, no-excuse absentee voting, instant runoff voting, and pre-registration of 16- and 17-year olds.
- **Institute electronic voter registration**.
- **Redesign and simplify the ballot** for 21st century voting.
- **Eliminate bipartisan duplication** at the Board of Elections.
- **Grant New Yorkers on parole the ability to vote**.
- Reduce **signature requirements and simplify the petition process**.
- Reform how **vacant seats are filled** to eliminate delay and to increase voter choice.
- Require **joint party elections of the governor and Lt. governor** to ensure effective partnership.
- **Allow primary winners to decline party nominations**, ending use of judicial appointments to lure candidates off the ballot.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- Institute a **public matching system; lower campaign contribution limits**; enact **"pay-to-play" restrictions** on those who do business with the state.
- Ensure effective **implementation of the law creating the chief enforcement counsel** at the Board of Elections.
- Ensure enforcement of new statutory requirements for **disclosure of independent expenditures**.
- **Clarify the definition of coordination between candidates and political committees**.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

- **Reinvigorate the committee system and use conference committees**, particularly during the budget process.
- Provide **greater opportunities for public testimony** and improve **public disclosure of committee proceedings** through the use of webcasting.
- Establish **equitable distribution of funds to legislators** for staffing and resources regardless of party affiliation.
- **Ensure legislative continuity** by allowing bills to remain on the calendar between the first and second year.

BUDGET REFORM

- Require the state to use **Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)**.
- Require detailed **online reporting of lump-sum appropriations and member items by elected officials**.
- Create a **more transparent, user-friendly budget process** with ample time for public and legislative review.
- Establish an **independent nonpartisan budget office**.
- **Bar the executive branch from transferring funds between agencies or programs** without legislative okay, and limit the **governor's ability to change policy** via appropriation bills.
- **End "messages of necessity,"** to allow adequate review.
- Establish a **later start date for the fiscal year**.
- Incorporate **performance budgeting with benchmarks**.

JUDICIAL REFORM

- Ensure that **proposals to increase the retirement age of judges include all of the state's trial court judges**.
- **Simplify the state's court system** by consolidating the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system.
- Create a **merit appointment system** for all state judges.

STATE GOVERNMENT REFORM

- Maintain the Port Authority as a **bi-state authority** while reforming the governance structure with a **single chief executive, tighter rules** on the board of directors, and **extending the open meetings law to the Port Authority**.
- Establish a **quadrennial compensation commission** to recommend **compensation levels for state elected officials**.
- **Limit the ability of a mayoral charter revision commission to "bump" other local charter referenda** off the ballot.
- **Ensure continued posting of data on the state's open data portal**, and improve transparency of lobbying, campaign finance and budgetary data.

NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

ELECTION REFORM

- **Enact a top-two election system** to replace the current closed partisan primary system.
- **Establish instant runoff voting** for citywide offices, borough presidents and the City Council.
- **Ensure that the Board of Elections measures its performance** through the Mayor's Management Report.
- **Create a voluntary municipal poll worker program** to expand the pool of qualified poll workers.
- **Redesign the ballot** to ensure that the font size is larger and the ballot is more readable.
- **Expand the Voter Guide** to include state and federal elections, and allow voters to opt for email guides.
- **Create Student Voter Registration Day** and **require schools provide voter registration forms to parents.**
- **Monitor implementation of the newly-updated Pro-Voter Law and Mayoral Directive #1** so New Yorkers are provided more opportunities to register to vote at city agencies.
- **Examine allowing legal residents to vote in municipal elections.**

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT OF POLICE MISCONDUCT

- **Enact further reforms to boost public confidence in accountability of police misconduct.**
- **Monitor use of the Civilian Complaint Review Board's prosecutorial authority** and the **NYPD Inspector General.**
- **Reduce the frequency of stop, question and frisk,** and ensure it is **conducted with professionalism.**
- **Make the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) permanent** and grant it subpoena power.

GOVERNMENT OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Monitor city agencies' compliance with the Open Data and Webcasting Laws.**
- **Create a central portal to track Freedom of Information Law** requests for city government records.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Increase the public funds and spending caps** to counteract the increase in independent expenditures.
- **No longer match contributions bundled by lobbyists;** ban placement agents from bundling donations, and expand doing business restrictions.
- **Ban the use of public funds for campaign consulting services** from firms that also lobby.
- **Further reduce public funds for** candidates facing minimal opposition and enact **"war chest" restrictions.**

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- **Monitor the 2014 Council Rules Reforms** in the areas of discretionary funding and bill drafting.
- **Limit stipend allocations** to leadership posts, reduce number of committees, and increase **financial disclosure** of outside income.
- **Restore the quadrennial cycle of elected official compensation review.**

BUDGET AND PENSION REFORM

- **Enact independent budgeting** for borough presidents, the public advocate, the Conflicts of Interest Board, and community boards.
- **Increase budget transparency** by more clearly defining units of appropriation and limiting their size.
- **Release the non-property revenue projections prior to Council hearings** on the Executive budget.
- **Create a centralized Pension Investment Board to create greater efficiencies in investments.**

COMMUNITY BOARD REFORM

- **Provide urban planners to community boards** apart from the borough presidents' offices.
- **Open community boards** to their communities by creating a **formal, standardized and transparent process** for filling positions. **Establish term limits of five consecutive two-year terms** for board members.

LAND USE

- **Include appointees on the Board of Standards and Appeals** from the borough presidents and public advocate.
- Acknowledge **197-a plans by reconciling them with other development plans in strategic planning.**

MAYORAL CONTROL OF CITY SCHOOLS

- **Seek renewal of mayoral control** while ensuring that the governance system **encourages accountability, provides transparency, engages more parents,** and **respects democratic participation.**