



CITIZENS UNION

## 2011 NEW YORK STATE POLICY AGENDA

As an independent, nonpartisan force dedicated to promoting good government and political reform in the city and state of New York, Citizens Union serves as a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for the common good. We work to ensure fair elections, clean campaigns, and open, effective government that is accountable to the public. Citizens Union in 2011 will work to end partisan gerrymandering and change the way in which redistricting occurs. We will build broad public support for the creation of an independent citizens redistricting commission that uses fair guidelines and criteria in drawing state legislative and congressional districts. Presented below are our positions on redistricting and other issues to create a government that better serves New Yorkers. Citizens Union urges the State Legislature and the Governor to successfully address the following issues:

### LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING REFORM

- Reform New York's redistricting process by creating a **new, independent citizens redistricting** commission that is fairly chosen to draw congressional and legislative district lines that do not favor any incumbent or political party and employs **even-handed and sensible redistricting guidelines** that provide for fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups, preservation of communities of interest, and compactness.
- Ensure adequate **transparency of redistricting proceedings, maps and other data**.

### ETHICS REFORM

- Implement **structural reforms to ethics and lobbying** oversight to fully monitor all intersections of money in politics and ensure **greater independence and effectiveness** by creating a **unitary ethics oversight body**, with no one elected official making a majority of the appointments, which has jurisdiction over legislative and executive ethics violations, as well as lobbying and campaign finance enforcement.
- Enhance public officials' **financial disclosure requirements** and ensure adequate **enforcement through random audits**.
- Determine if **legislators who are convicted of felonies** relating to the abuse of public office should be **eligible to receive pension benefits** from the state.
- Empower the Attorney General to **investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption**, including serious election law malfeasance.

### ELECTION REFORM

- Establish a **new elections governance structure** that eliminates as much of the current bipartisan structure as practicable. At the state level, create a Chief Elections Officer responsible for major policy decisions and a Nonpartisan Elections Board responsible for standardizing state election procedure and other quasi-judicial functions. Mirror this structure at the local level, with a Chief Local Elections Officer and a Board of Canvassers with limited jurisdiction.
- Develop a **standardized, comprehensive poll worker training curriculum**; work with local election boards to implement the new poll worker training requirements; and expand recruitment of poll workers to ensure that each county has an **adequate number of qualified workers**.
- Require the **Board of Elections in the City of New York to report performance and other data to the Mayor's Management Report (MMR)** and in their annual reports to the City Council.
- Reform New York's **draconian ballot access requirements** to allow candidates easier access to the ballot and voters greater choice of candidates; lower the number of signatures needed to appear on the ballot; and simplify the petition process to reduce error when completing a petition.
- Implement reforms to **modernize the voter registration process and increase voter participation**, such as easing registration deadlines, implementing Election Day voter registration (EDR), no-excuse absentee voting, instant runoff voting (IRV) and early voting.
- Reform the **selection process by which vacant elective offices are filled**, in particular to allow for the governor to appoint a lieutenant governor with confirmation by a majority of the assembly and the senate voting separately, following

- the 2009 court decision, *Skelos v. Paterson*, which upheld the governor's authority to unilaterally appoint a lieutenant governor.
- **Redesign the ballot** to ensure that voters are able to **clearly read candidates' names, titles of offices, designations and ballot questions**; that **instructions are clear and accurate**; and that the ballot is able to split candidates between multiple pages.
  - **Require local boards of election to post sample ballots online prior to Election Day** and link ballots to poll-site locators.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- Overhaul the state's lax campaign finance system by significantly **lowering campaign contribution limits**; instituting a **public matching system** similar to the New York City model; **banning the personal use of campaign contributions**; enacting **pay-to-play restrictions** for lobbyists and those who do business with the state; increasing **contribution and expenditure disclosure**; and increasing fines for violation of election law.
- Provide for **complete and clear disclosure of independent expenditures** by political committees, unions, corporations, non-profits and other organizations.

#### GOVERNMENT REFORM

- Monitor **implementation of public authority reforms** to ensure they are done accountably, efficiently, and transparently, and push for continued reform specifically through consolidation, reducing the number of public authorities.
- **Limit the ability of a mayoral charter revision commission to "bump" other local charter referenda** from appearing on the ballot.
- Establish a **quadrennial compensation commission** to evaluate and recommend **compensation levels of all state elected officials**.
- Ensure that the new **State Government Public Affairs Channel** and corresponding website is independently managed, has comprehensive content and is user-friendly.
- **Determine whether the State Comptroller should continue to be the sole trustee of the state pension system** and ensure the codification of reforms to the Office of State Comptroller regarding pay-to-play.

#### BUDGET REFORM

- Ensure a **more transparent budget process** that allows ample time for public and legislative review in a **user-friendly format**.
- Establish an **independent nonpartisan budget office** to provide revenue projections as well as economic and policy analysis.
- **Stop using "messages of necessity"** that force lawmakers to immediately vote on budget bills without fully reviewing their contents.
- Establish a **later start date for the fiscal year** which takes into consideration important budgetary timing factors.
- Provide for **greater accountability and transparency of member items**, as well as their **equal distribution**.
- Incorporate **performance budgeting with outcome measurement**.
- **Limit the ability of the governor to enact policy changes** governing the use of resources in appropriation bills by requiring that such bills be consistent with existing law or proposed changes in separate legislation.
- Require the use of **Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)** to accurately reflect the state's actual liabilities and revenues.

#### LEGISLATIVE REFORM

- **Reinvigorate legislative committees**, for example by providing more reasonable means of discharging bills, increasing the ability of members to call for public hearings, and promoting the **routine use of conference committees**, particularly during the budget process.
- Provide the public a **greater opportunity to provide testimony** at committee meetings and require **fuller public reporting of committee activities**, including webcasting proceedings and issuing reports accompanying bills.
- Establish a **more equitable distribution of funds to legislators** for staffing and resources regardless of party affiliation.

#### JUDICIAL REFORM

- Reform the judicial system by creating a **commission-based appointment system** for the selection of all New York judges, including Supreme Court justices, and consolidate the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system.
- Establish **judicial qualifications commissions** that reflect the geographical, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of New York to evaluate candidates' qualifications for office for all of New York's courts of record. Bar associations and civic organizations should be entrusted to appoint members to the commissions.
- Develop and conduct a **more expansive voter education program** regarding judicial elections.