



CITIZENS UNION

2012 NEW YORK STATE POLICY AGENDA

Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. Citizens Union serves as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform. We work to ensure fair and open elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public. We are New Yorkers from diverse backgrounds and political beliefs, connected to our communities and united in our commitment to put the city's long-term interest ahead of all special interests. Principled and pragmatic, Citizens Union is an independent force for constructive reform, driving policy and educating the public to achieve accountable government in the City and State of New York.

Citizens Union in 2012 will continue to work to end partisan gerrymandering and change the way in which redistricting occurs. We will also principally work to achieve campaign finance reform and the modernization and simplification of the state's courts. Presented below are our positions on these 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 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**.

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.
- Ensure **complete and clear disclosure of "independent expenditures"** by political committees, unions, corporations, non-profits and other organizations by monitoring development of new regulations, as required by the 2011 ethics reforms.

ETHICS REFORM

- Monitor recent **structural reforms to ethics and lobbying** oversight and enforcement charged to the newly created Joint Commission on Public Ethics to ensure **independent and effective enforcement**, and evaluate possible improvements.
- Empower the Attorney General to **investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption**, including serious election law malfeasance.
- Amend the constitution to extend pension forfeiture, subject to due process safeguards, to all **public officers and legislators who have been convicted of felonies**, building on the 2011 ethics reforms which only apply to future state employees.

JUDICIAL REFORM

- **Simplify and modernize the state's court system** by consolidating the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system.
- Create a **merit-based appointment system** through creation of a commission for the selection of all New York's judges.

ELECTION REFORM

- **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.
- 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.
- Implement reforms to **increase voter participation or ease the voting process**, such as implementing Election Day voter registration (EDR), no-excuse absentee voting, instant runoff voting (IRV) and early voting.
- Pass legislation automatically **granting New Yorkers who are on parole the ability to vote**.
- Examine ways to **modernize election administration**, such as **simplifying voter registration**, creating **online pollworker applications** and requiring **local boards of election to post sample ballots online**.
- 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.
- Reform the **selection process by which vacant elective offices are filled**, creating a nonpartisan special election or primary election for state legislative vacancies and allowing for the governor to appoint a lieutenant governor with confirmation by a majority of the assembly and the senate voting separately.

GOVERNMENT REFORM

- **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 state elected officials**, as has been done for the state's judges.
- Ensure that the **State Government Public Affairs Channel** and its corresponding website are independently managed, have comprehensive content and are user-friendly.
- Determine whether the **State Comptroller should continue to be the sole trustee of the state pension system** and whether reforms are needed to the pension and civil service systems to **balance the needs of workers and taxpayers**.

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.
- 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.
- Provide for **greater accountability and transparency of member items**, as well as their **equal distribution among legislators**, if funded in the state budget.

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.