



## CITIZENS UNION

### NEW YORK STATE POLICY AGENDA 2014

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 2014 will educate the public regarding the importance of the constitutional amendment to reform the state's redistricting process and work for its passage by the voters during the 2014 elections. We also will continue to champion reforms we have long supported to combat public corruption and reform the state's campaign finance laws, many of which were adopted by the Moreland Commission in its December 2013 Preliminary Report. Enactment of reforms to improve election administration and increase voter participation will also continue to occupy our efforts. Presented below are our recommendations to create a government that better serves New Yorkers. Citizens Union urges the State Legislature, the Governor and relevant state agencies to successfully address the following issues:

#### **LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING REFORM**

- Reform New York's redistricting process by **educating voters and urging adoption of this needed constitutional amendment to create a new, independent redistricting commission** that establishes fair criteria and schedules for the development of district maps and removes the practice of legislators drawing their own district lines.

#### **CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM**

- Overhaul the state's lax campaign finance system by instituting a **public matching system** similar to the New York City model; ensuring independent, effective enforcement to prevent violations of campaign finance law while assisting candidates in compliance; significantly **lowering campaign contribution limits; banning the personal use of campaign contributions**; and to deter actual corruption or the appearance of corruption, enacting "**pay-to-play**" restrictions for lobbyists and those who do business with the state.
- Ensure **full disclosure of contributions and expenditures in elections**, including "**independent expenditures**" by political clubs, political committees, unions, corporations, non-profits and other organizations for both express advocacy and issue-based communications.
- **Clarify the definition of and restrict coordination between candidates and political committees** to ensure proper reporting of expenditures and contributions.

#### **ELECTION REFORM**

- **Modernize election administration**, such as automating **voter registration** and communicating information to voters through email and mobile applications.

#### **ELECTION REFORM CONTINUED**

- Implement reforms to **increase voter participation or ease the voting process**, such as Early Voting, Election Day voter registration (EDR), no-excuse absentee voting, and instant runoff voting (IRV).
- **Redesign the ballot** so that it has no more than three languages, a horizontal layout, a minimum font size and visual instructions at the top of the ballot to **ensure that voters are able to clearly read candidates' names, titles of offices, designations and ballot questions, as well as understand how to cast their votes**.
- Establish a new elections **governance structure** that eliminates unnecessary bipartisan duplication and **ensures professional and standardized administration of elections**. At the state level, create a Chief Elections Officer responsible for policy decisions and a Nonpartisan Elections Board responsible for quasi-judicial functions. At the local level, create a Chief Local Elections Officer and a Board of Canvassers with limited jurisdiction.
- Pass legislation automatically **granting New Yorkers who are on parole the ability to vote**.
- Reform New York's **draconian ballot access requirements** by **lowering the number of signatures and simplifying the petition process** to allow candidates easier access to the ballot and voters greater choice of candidates.
- 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.

#### ELECTION REFORM CONTINUED

- Require the **joint nomination of the governor and lieutenant governor** to ensure they can work effectively together.
- Allow the **declination of party nominations by candidates** to prevent the political use of judicial appointments.

#### ETHICS REFORM

- Ensure **enactment of the Governor's Public Trust Act**, with improvements to ensure **alignment with federal bribery statutes** and the **use of judicial discretion to determine the loss of certain state benefits or contracts**, as well as **ensure that benefits are not denied for certain classes of persons when an individual breaks the public trust**, such as tax credits for residential coops.
- Ensure recent **structural reforms to ethics and lobbying** oversight and enforcement charged to the newly created Joint Commission on Public Ethics result in **independent and effective enforcement**, and make improvements such as **increased disclosure of decision-making** by the Commission.
- Empower the Attorney General to **investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption**, including serious election law malfeasance.
- Amend the state constitution to extend pension forfeiture, subject to due process safeguards, to all **public officers and elected officials who have been convicted of felonies**, building on the 2011 ethics reforms which only apply to future state employees.

#### GOVERNMENT REFORM

- Use **information technology to further open state government, ensure continued posting of data on the state's open data portal**, and further improve transparency and collection of lobbying and budgetary data.
- **Limit the ability of a mayoral charter revision commission to "bump" other local charter referenda** off 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.

#### BUDGET REFORM

- Require regular, detailed **online reporting and transparency of lump-sum appropriations and member items** to include funds distributed and unspent, legislative sponsors, intended purposes and recipients.
- Ensure a **more transparent and user-friendly budget process** that allows ample time for public and legislative review.

#### BUDGET REFORM CONTINUED

- Establish an **independent nonpartisan budget office** to provide revenue projections as well as economic and policy analysis.
- Ensure that **funds are not able to be transferred between agencies** or programs without legislative approval, and 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.
- **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**.
- Require the use of **Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)** to accurately reflect the state's actual liabilities and revenues.

#### JUDICIAL REFORM

- Ensure that **proposals to increase the retirement age of judges include all of the state's trial court judges**.
- **Simplify and modernize the state's court system** by consolidating the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system.
- Create a commission-based **merit selection system** for appointment of New York's trial and appellate judges, similar to that used for the Court of Appeals.

#### LEGISLATIVE REFORM

- **Reinvigorate committees** by providing a better means of discharging bills, increasing the ability of members to call for public hearings, and promoting the **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 on pending legislation.
- Establish a **more equitable distribution of funds to legislators** for staffing and resources regardless of party affiliation.
- **Ensure the continuity of the legislative session** by allowing bills to retain their place on the calendar between the first and second year.