



2008 New York City Public 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 leaders have taken very positive steps 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 2008 will continue to engage New Yorkers, our elected leaders, and other decision-makers to ensure the holding of elections that enfranchises voters and encourages competitive contests, and 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; establish a secure, accurate, and accessible new voting system; improve the administration of elections; bring greater public oversight to police conduct and confidence in the handling of incidents of misconduct; monitor the effectiveness of the new lobbying and campaign finance laws; evaluate the effectiveness of mayoral control of city schools; advance effective citizen participation in land use decisions; and establish greater accountability and oversight of city government and its decisions.

Citizens Union is committed to ensure that the following measures are implemented by the appropriate branches of government, city agencies and public entities to meet the goals outlined above:

ELECTION REFORM

- Ensure that the **testing and certification of new voting machines for the City of New York is not compromised and proceeds in a transparent manner** with the high standards set by the state to **ensure voting systems are secure, accurate, and accessible as** required by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).
- Develop an extensive **public education program to prepare 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 the tasks required of them; **training must reflect sensitivity to non-English speaking and disabled voters**, and must emphasize the revised poll site procedures, including provisional ballot requirements, required under HAVA.
- **Increase the base pay** for those serving as poll workers on the day of the election.

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CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

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- **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.

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.
- 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 in a **review of the major restructuring of government in the late 1980’s.**
- **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 experience of term limits.

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.
- Ensure **proper public participation, accountability and transparency** in land use planning and decision-making processes 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 in decision-making, effective governance, accountability, and transparency.
- Ensure **effective and active functioning** of the charter mandated agency, the **Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC)**, to facilitate greater public access to city information.
- Restore the quadrennial cycle of **elected official compensation review.**