

2010 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 has served 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 citizens of New York. Citizens Union in 2010 will launch a comprehensive, coalition and member-based campaign to change the way Albany functions. The major components of this campaign are to: (1) eliminate gerrymandering; (2) improve all aspects of elections in New York State; (3) restore public confidence in state government; and (4) improve government transparency. With these goals in mind, presented below are our detailed positions on how to accomplish these long overdue and much-needed reforms 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.
- Ensure adequate **public disclosure of redistricting proceedings and data**.
- Create an **effective mechanism for legislative approval** of the independent redistricting commission's plan.

ETHICS REFORM

- Implement **structural reforms to ethics and lobbying** oversight to ensure **greater independence and effectiveness** so that no one elected official makes a majority of the appointments, such as creating a **unitary ethics oversight body** with jurisdiction over legislative and executive ethics violations, lobbying and campaign finance enforcement to fully monitor all intersections of money in politics.
- Enhance public officials' **financial disclosure requirements** and ensure adequate **enforcement through random audits**.

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.
- Ensure that **certified voting systems** are tested before use to comply with New York's strong voting system standards so that the systems are **secure, accurate, and accessible** as required under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA).
- Ensure continued progress to **fully implement NYSVoter** Statewide voter database with flexible matching practices, timely list maintenance and a process to ensure that eligible voters are not inadvertently removed from the voter rolls or disenfranchised at the polls.
- Develop an extensive **public education program to prepare for the transition to entirely new voting systems**.
- 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**. This includes developing curriculum that reflects sensitivity to non-English speaking and disabled voters and emphasizes revised poll site procedures related to the implementation of HAVA and ensuring all poll workers receive hands-on training.
- 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.

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- Implement reforms to **increase voter participation**, such as Election Day voter registration (EDR), no-excuse absentee voting, online voter registration, 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.
- Repeal the "**Full Face Ballot**" provision that requires voters to see in one singular view the entire ballot containing all the offices and candidates.

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.

GOVERNMENT REFORM

- Monitor **implementation of 2009 public authority reforms** to ensure they are accountably, efficiently, and transparently implemented, 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.

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 some or all members to the commissions.
- Develop and conduct a **more expansive voter education program** regarding judicial elections.
- **Increase the salaries of the state's judges and provide a mechanism for salary increases** through the creation of a quadrennial compensation commission.

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 and 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.
- Require regular, detailed **reporting on lump-sum appropriations and member items** to include funds distributed, legislative sponsor, and recipients.
- 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.

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.
- Provide the public with an **increased opportunity to provide testimony** at committee meetings and require more **thorough public reporting of committee activities**.
- Establish a more **equitable distribution of funds to legislators** for staffing and resources regardless of party affiliation.