

2016 NEW YORK CITY AND NEW YORK STATE POLICY AGENDA

Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. We are a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform in pursuit of clean campaigns, fair elections, honest and efficient government, and a civically-engaged public. In 2016, Citizens Union will focus to enact laws and policies that strengthen state ethics laws, address our declining voter participation rates, reform how elected official compensation is decided, preserve strong home rule for the city, improve police accountability, and reform the delegate selection process making it more likely that New York voters will support the call in 2016 for a state constitutional convention.

NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

ELECTION REFORM

- **Enact a top-two election system** to replace the current closed partisan primary system.
- **Establish instant runoff voting** for citywide offices, borough presidents and the City Council.
- **Ensure that the Board of Elections measures its performance** through the Mayor's Management Report.
- **Implement split shifts and create a voluntary municipal poll worker program** to expand the pool of qualified poll workers.
- **Redesign the ballot** to ensure that the font size is larger and the ballot is more readable.
- **Expand the Voter Guide** to include state and federal elections, and allow voters to opt for email guides.
- **Create permanent Student Voter Registration Day and require schools provide voter registration forms to parents.**
- **Monitor the newly-updated Pro-Voter Law and Mayoral Directive #1** so New Yorkers are provided more opportunities to register to vote at city agencies, including electronically.
- **Examine allowing legal residents to vote in city elections.**

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- **Monitor the 2014 Council Rules Reforms** in the areas of discretionary funding and bill drafting, and push to reduce number of committees.
- **Improve compensation for city elected officials that ends stipends, restricts amount of outside earned income, increases transparency of outside earned income**, including through online posting of forms, and **require prospective adoption of salary increases at the beginning of new terms.**

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Increase the public funds and spending caps** to counteract the increase in independent expenditures.
- **No longer match contributions bundled by lobbyists**; ban placement agents from bundling donations, and expand doing business restrictions.
- **Ban the use of public funds for campaign consulting services** from firms that also lobby.
- **Further reduce public funds for candidates facing minimal opposition and enact "war chest" restrictions.**

GOVERNMENT OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Monitor city agencies' compliance with the Open Data and Webcasting Laws.**
- **Create a central portal to track Freedom of Information Law requests** for city government records for all agencies.

BUDGET AND PENSION REFORM

- **Enact independent budgeting** for borough presidents, the public advocate, the Conflicts of Interest Board, and community boards.
- **Increase budget transparency** by more clearly defining units of appropriation and limiting their size.
- **Release the non-property revenue projections prior to Council hearings** on the Executive budget.
- **Create a centralized Pension Investment Board to create greater efficiencies in investments.**

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT OF POLICE MISCONDUCT

- **Enact further reforms to boost public confidence in accountability of police misconduct.**
- **Monitor use of the Civilian Complaint Review Board's prosecutorial authority and the NYPD Inspector General.**
- **Reduce the frequency of stop, question and frisk**, and ensure it is conducted with professionalism.
- **Make the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) permanent** and grant it subpoena power.

COMMUNITY BOARD REFORM

- **Provide urban planners to community boards** apart from the borough presidents' offices.
- **Open community boards to their communities** by creating a standardized and transparent process for filling positions.
- **Establish term limits of five consecutive two-year terms** for board members and examine term limits for leadership posts.

LAND USE

- **Include appointees on the Board of Standards and Appeals** from the borough presidents and public advocate.
- **Acknowledge 197-a plans by reconciling them with other development plans in strategic planning.**

MAYORAL CONTROL OF CITY SCHOOLS

- **Make mayoral control permanent**, while ensuring that the governance system encourages accountability, provides transparency, engages more parents, and respects democratic participation.

NEW YORK STATE POLICY AGENDA

ETHICS REFORM

- Increase **disclosure of all sources of outside income** through eliminating the personal services loophole.
- **Limit outside income earned by state legislators up to 25 percent, while enacting a salary increase and eliminating stipends.**
- **Reform the Joint Commission on Public Ethics**, giving it greater jurisdiction over investigations and hearings, reforming its voting procedures, and increasing disclosure of its decision-making.
- **Modernize reporting of outside income and lobbying activities** through fully electronic reporting.
- Empower the Attorney General to **investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption.**
- Amend the state constitution to **extend pension forfeiture**, subject to due process safeguards, to **public officers and elected officials who have been convicted of felonies.**

ELECTION REFORM

- **Increase voter participation** with early voting, Election Day voter registration, no-excuse absentee voting, instant runoff voting, and pre-registration of 16- and 17-year olds.
- **Institute electronic voter registration.**
- **Redesign and simplify the ballot** for 21st century voting.
- **Eliminate bipartisan structure** at the Board of Elections, putting in place professional, nonpartisan administration.
- **Grant New Yorkers on parole the ability to vote.**
- Reduce **signature requirements and simplify petition process.**
- Reform how **vacant seats are filled** to eliminate delay and to increase voter choice.
- Require **joint party elections of the governor and Lt. governor** to ensure effective partnership.
- **Allow primary winners to decline party nominations**, ending use of judicial appointments to lure candidates off the ballot.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- Institute a **public matching system; lower campaign contribution limits; enact “pay-to-play” restrictions** on those who do business with the state.
- **Close the LLC loophole** to ensure that limited liability companies have the same contribution limits as other corporations, rather than the higher limit for individuals.
- Ensure effective **implementation of the law creating the chief enforcement counsel** at the Board of Elections.
- Ensure enforcement of new statutory requirements for **disclosure of independent expenditures** for political communications made independently of candidates.
- **Clarify the definition of coordination between candidates and political committees.**

MUNICIPAL HOME RULE

- **Make mayoral control of city schools permanent**, with a governance system that provides for accountability, transparency, parent engagement, and democratic participation.
- **Amend the Municipal Home Rule Law** to limit the ability of a mayor-appointed charter revision commission to “bump” other local charter amendments from appearing on the ballot.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

- **Simplify voting for delegates:** allow voters to cast one vote for district delegates, eliminate slate voting for at-large delegates, **lower petition signature requirements**, provide public financing.
- **Eliminate “double dipping”** by requiring state legislators to vacate their seats if elected as delegates and limit accruing of pensions for all government officials.
- **Require publication of voter information pamphlets** about candidates for convention delegate seats.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

- **Reinvigorate the committee system** and **use conference committees**, particularly during the budget process.
- **Increase opportunities for public testimony** and improve **public disclosure of committee proceedings** via expanded webcasting.
- Establish **equitable distribution of funds to legislators** for staffing and resources regardless of party affiliation.
- **Ensure legislative continuity** by allowing bills to remain on the calendar between the first and second year.

BUDGET REFORM

- Require state use of **Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.**
- Reform **elected officials’ lump-sum appropriations and member items** to eliminate vague placeholders in budget legislation, address conflicts of interest, and report all spending online.
- Create a **more transparent, user-friendly budget process** with ample time for public and legislative review.
- Establish an **independent nonpartisan budget office.**
- **Bar the executive branch from transferring funds between agencies or programs wholesale**, without legislative okay.
- Limit **governor’s ability to change policy** via appropriation bills.
- **End “messages of necessity”** which allow the governor to call for immediate votes on legislation and waive the 3-day aging requirement, providing for greater legislative and public review.
- Establish a **later start date for the fiscal year.**
- Incorporate **performance budgeting with benchmarks.**

JUDICIAL REFORM

- Ensure that **proposals to increase the retirement age of judges include all of the state’s trial court judges.**
- **Simplify the state’s court system** by consolidating the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system.
- Create a **merit appointment system** for all state judges.

STATE GOVERNMENT REFORM

- Maintain the Port Authority as a **bi-state authority** while reforming the governance structure with a **single chief executive, tighter rules** on the board of directors, and **extending the open meetings law to the Port Authority.**
- **Ensure continued posting of data on NYS open data portal**, and improve transparency of lobbying, campaign finance, and budget.
- **Expand the Governor’s Executive Order on faster appeals** for Freedom of Information Law requests for all government bodies.

Citizens Union of the City of New York

299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007-1976

phone 212-227-0342 • fax 212-227-0345 • policy@citizensunion.org • www.citizensunion.org

Peter J.W. Sherwin, Chair • Dick Dadey, Executive Director