

2010 NEW YORK CITY 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 is committed to ensuring that the following measures are implemented and urges the appropriate branches of city government, agencies and public entities to successfully address the following issues:

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE and FUNCTIONING

- Review ten major areas of **city government structure and function** during the deliberations of the **2010 city charter revision commission**, including **roles and responsibilities of elected offices, ethics and lobbying oversight, the balance of power** between branches of government, **land use and zoning, term limits, city council compensation, voter participation and competitive elections** to make recommendations for improving and strengthening the charter and city governance.
- Institute **term limits of two four-year terms for the mayor and three four-year terms for the city council** to allow the council to better provide a necessary check and balance against a more-empowered executive branch.
- **Improve access to city agency data and administrative proceedings**, including webcasting of hearings and public meetings.
- Improve the City's redistricting process by creating a **new, more independent redistricting commission** that is fairly chosen to draw council district lines to not favor any incumbent or political party and that employs **even-handed and sensible redistricting guidelines** that provide for fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups.

ELECTION REFORM

- Advocate for 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.
- **Improve accountability and transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York** by advocating for timely release of required annual post-election reports; inclusion in the preliminary and final versions of the Mayor's Management Report; and providing additional public disclosure of City Board meetings, including webcasting of city board meetings, operations, and election statistics.
- Urge the **City Board to increase access to voting information** through the execution of an expansive public outreach and education campaign, and innovative use of their existing website and phone hotline.
- 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); should implementation of the new voting system be compromised the City Board should adopt a contingency plan for usage of existing voting systems that includes a more comprehensive public education component on the current ballot marking devices.
- Develop an **extensive public education program** specifically tailored for the transition to a new voting system so voters are familiar with the new processes and technology before Election Day.
- 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**.

(continued on reverse)

- Urge the City to **increase the base training pay** for those serving as poll workers on the day of the election, and work with the City Board to ensure all poll workers attend a training session before working on Election Day.
- Urge the City to work in conjunction with the City Board to **make necessary improvements to the voting system storage facilities** to accommodate the new computerized voting systems that the City Board will ultimately acquire.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Curb further the outlay of public funds** to candidates facing minimal opposition.
- **Lower campaign contribution limits.**
- **Establish a more stringent “war chest” restriction** to limit the transfer of funds raised in one race for use in another.
- **Monitor the implementation of the campaign finance doing business contribution restrictions** based on the experience of the 2009 municipal elections and the anticipated Campaign Finance Board’s post-election report.
- **Evaluate restrictions regarding organizational contributors**, such as unions and political parties.

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- **Improve webcasting of council hearings** to ensure public access to council proceedings and further **improve the legislative search tool** to make it more user-friendly.
- 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 by half** and redistribute their roles and responsibilities for greater effectiveness and efficiency so council members are not spread too thin across too many committees.
- 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**.
- **Limit stipend allocations** to leadership positions and require **greater financial disclosure** by those who earn income outside of their council positions.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY and OVERSIGHT

- Improve **oversight and effective adjudication of police misconduct claims** to instill public confidence in the process and the city’s police force, including a specific effort to **transfer prosecutorial power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board** over substantiated claims of police misconduct.
- **Assess alternative funding sources for much-needed transportation and infrastructure improvements** by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to ensure the allocation of costs for the public transportation system are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.
- Ensure **proper public participation, accountability and transparency** in zoning and **land use planning decisions** that addresses the interests of local communities while supporting the economic development needs of the city.
- Monitor the **effectiveness of the reforms to the education governance structure** to ensure that concerns surrounding parental involvement, effective governance, accountability, results, and transparency of operations are adequately resolved.
- Ensure **effective and active functioning** of charter mandated agencies to facilitate greater public access to city information, including the **Commission on Public Information and Communication (COPIC)**.
- Restore the **quadrennial cycle of elected official compensation review**, which should next occur in 2011.
- Ensure the appointment of a **commission to study the effectiveness of the lobbying reform bills** passed in 2006.
- Limit the enactment of local laws creating **non-functioning or non-appointed task forces or commissions**.