



CITIZENS UNION

NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA 2013

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 2013 will continue to work to make the City of New York's government more accountable and transparent. We will also principally work to bring about better election administration and voter participation before this year's municipal elections, further reform the discretionary funding process, and ensure the City Lobbying Commission completes its work and that its recommendations are put into law. Citizens Union will also develop a position on Stop, Question and Frisk to ensure that the policy is used more judiciously and implemented more effectively and that it has clear benefits and does not undermine the Police Department's relationship with communities.

Presented below are our positions on these and other issues to create a government that better serves New Yorkers. Citizens Union urges the City Council, Mayor and relevant government agencies to successfully address the following issues:

ELECTION REFORM

- **Advance the establishment of a top-two election system**, an alternative open system consisting of two rounds of voting, to replace the current closed partisan primary system.
- **Improve accountability and transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York** by evaluating the Board based on performance benchmarks with **performance data reported** to the City Council or in the preliminary and final versions of the Mayor's Management Report; **webcasting City Board meetings**; and **hiring a qualified Executive Director** to fill the long vacant position.
- **Improve election administration by creating a voluntary municipal poll worker program** to allow qualified city employees to work on Election Day and examining administrative changes to **ensure the privacy of the ballot** under the paper ballot system.
- **Expand voter education and encourage participation by broadening the Voter Guide** to include all contests occurring in the city such as state and federal elections; **providing voters email notification of upcoming election dates, deadlines and availability of sample ballots**; and **requiring the Department of Education to give registration forms to parents** who enroll their children in school.
- **Ensure city agencies comply with pro-voter laws that require they provide opportunities for voters to register to vote** when receiving their routine services.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

- **Improve oversight and effective adjudication of police misconduct claims, by ensuring that the transfer of prosecutorial power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board** for their substantiated claims of police misconduct allows for adequate independence and effectiveness.
- **Establish the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) as a permanent commission** in the City Charter while **empowering the CCPC to issue subpoenas**.
- **Ensure that the 2012-2013 districting process for council district lines provides for fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups and does not favor or disfavor any incumbent, candidate or political party**, and determine if additional reforms are needed to make the districting commission more independent and effective.
- **Restore the quadrennial cycle of elected official compensation review**.
- **Ensure the enactment of reforms to the city's Pension Boards to increase investment returns and reduce costs to taxpayers, including creation of a centralized Pension Investment Board**.

GOVERNMENT OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

- **Ensure the Lobbying Commission completes its report to the Council** and enact reforms to **make more lobbying activity transparent to the public.**
- **Ensure access to city agency data and administrative proceedings**, through proactive publishing of data and timely publishing of agency compliance plans as required by the Open Data Law, as well as webcasting of agency public hearings and meetings.
- **Ensure that government transparency is appropriately balanced with the need for efficiency** through the actions of the Report and Advisory Board Review Commission.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Prohibit contributions bundled by lobbying organizations or lobbyists from receiving matching funds**, and **ban placement agents from bundling contributions** for any elected official directly or indirectly influencing decisions granting pension business.
- **Prohibit participants in the city's campaign finance program from using public matching funds to purchase strategic campaign consulting services from firms that also provide lobbying services.**
- **Allow for contributions to be given via text messages**, while ensuring that donations made via this method can maximize public matching funds.
- **Further curb the outlay of public funds** to candidates facing minimal opposition.
- **Establish tougher "war chest" restrictions** to limit the transfer of funds from one race to another.
- **Continue to monitor disclosure of independent and third party expenditures in city elections.**

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- **Ensure a more equitable and needs-based distribution of expense and capital discretionary funding** to individual councilmembers, and provide for **greater transparency of all discretionary funds.**
- **Create stronger and more independent council committees** by empowering all committee chairs to set their own agendas, schedule votes, and participate more fully in committee staffing decisions.
- **Reduce the number of council committees by half** and redistribute their roles and responsibilities for greater effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Limit stipend allocations** to leadership positions and require **greater financial disclosure** by those who earn income outside of their council positions.

BUDGET REFORM

- **Establish independent budgeting** for the borough presidents, the Conflicts of Interest Board, the public advocate, and community boards.
- **Make the budget process more transparent** by more clearly defining units of appropriation and limiting their size so they are less than a majority of an agency's budget. Release the non-property revenue projections prior to Council hearings on the Executive budget.

COMMUNITY BOARD REFORM

- **Provide a pool of urban planners to be available to community boards** outside the auspices of the borough presidents' offices.
- **Professionalize and open community boards** to the communities they serve by creating a **formal standardized and transparent process for filling community board positions.**
- **Standardize term limits of five consecutive two-year terms for members of all boards.**

LAND USE

- **Change the appointment process for the Board of Standards and Appeals** to include additional representatives from the borough presidents and the public advocate.
- Improve the process to **better integrate 197-a plans into strategic planning** so, at a minimum, plans are acknowledged and addressed when other planning is in conflict with 197-a plans.