



CITIZENS UNION

NEW YORK STATE 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 work ensure enactment of the constitutional amendment to reform the state's redistricting process. We will also principally work to achieve campaign finance reform and the enactment of reforms to improve election administration and increase voter participation. Presented below are our positions on these and other issues to create a government that better serves New Yorkers. Citizens Union urges the state legislature and the governor and relevant state agencies to successfully address the following issues:

LEGISLATIVE REDISTRICTING REFORM

- Reform New York's redistricting process by **enacting the constitutional amendment which achieved second passage in the legislature to create a new, independent redistricting commission** that must follow fair criteria and schedules to ensure that legislators no longer directly draw their own district lines.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- Overhaul the state's lax campaign finance system by instituting a **public matching system** similar to the New York City model; ensuring **independent and effective enforcement** to prevent violations of campaign finance law while assisting candidates in compliance; significantly **lowering campaign contribution limits; banning the personal use of campaign contributions**; and to deter actual corruption or the appearance of corruption, enacting **"pay-to-play" restrictions** for lobbyists and those who do business with the state.
- Ensure **full disclosure of contributions and expenditures in elections**, including **"independent expenditures"** by political committees, unions, corporations, non-profits and other organizations for both express advocacy and issue-based communications.

ELECTION REFORM

- **Modernize election administration**, such as **automating voter registration** and communicating information to voters through email and mobile applications.
- Implement reforms to **increase voter participation or ease the voting process**, such as Early Voting, Election Day voter registration (EDR), no-excuse absentee voting, and instant runoff voting (IRV).
- **Redesign the ballot** so that it has **no more than two languages**, a horizontal layout, a minimum font size and visual instructions at the top of the ballot to **ensure that voters are able to clearly read candidates' names, titles of offices, designations and ballot questions, and understand how to cast their vote**.
- Establish a **new elections governance structure** that eliminates as much of the current bipartisan structure as practicable and ensures professional and standardized administration of elections. At the state level, create a Chief Elections Officer responsible for major policy decisions and a nonpartisan Elections Board responsible for quasi-judicial functions. Mirror this structure at the local level, with a Chief Local Elections Officer and a Board of Canvassers with limited jurisdiction.
- Pass legislation automatically **granting New Yorkers who are on parole the ability to vote**.
- 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.
- Reform the **selection process by which vacant elective offices are filled**, creating a nonpartisan special election or primary election for state legislative vacancies and allowing for the governor to appoint a lieutenant governor with confirmation by a majority of the assembly and the senate voting separately.

ELECTION REFORM (CONTINUED)

- Require the **joint nomination of the governor and lieutenant governor** to ensure they can work effectively together.
- **Allow the declination of party nominations by candidates** to prevent the political use of judicial appointments.

ETHICS REFORM

- Ensure recent **structural reforms to ethics and lobbying** oversight and enforcement charged to the newly created Joint Commission on Public Ethics result in **independent and effective enforcement**, and make improvements such as increased disclosure of decision-making by the Commission.
- Empower the Attorney General to **investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption**, including serious election law malfeasance.
- Amend the constitution to extend pension forfeiture, subject to due process safeguards, to all **public officers and legislators who have been convicted of felonies**, building on the 2011 ethics reforms which only applied to future state employees.

GOVERNMENT REFORM

- Use **information technology to open state government**, such as requiring data to be proactively posted online, improving government websites, and ensuring that the **State Government Public Affairs Channel** and its corresponding website are created, have comprehensive content and are user-friendly.
- **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 state elected officials**, as has been done for the state’s judges.

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 as well as economic and policy analysis.
- Ensure that **funds are not able to be transferred between agencies** or programs without legislative approval.
- **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.
- 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.
- Require the use of **Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)** to accurately reflect the state’s actual liabilities and revenues.
- Provide for **greater accountability and transparency of member items**, as well as their **equal distribution among legislators**, if funded in the state budget.

JUDICIAL REFORM

- **Simplify and modernize the state’s court system** by consolidating the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system.
- Create a commission-based **merit selection system** for appointment of New York’s trial and appellate judges, similar to that used for the Court of Appeals.

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**, particularly during the budget process.
- Provide the public a **greater opportunity to provide testimony** at committee meetings and require **fuller public reporting of committee activities**, including **webcasting proceedings** and issuing reports on pending legislation.
- Establish a **more equitable distribution of funds to legislators** for staffing and resources regardless of party affiliation.
- **Ensure the continuity of the legislative session** by allowing bills to retain their place on the calendar between the first and second year.