



CITIZENS UNION

NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA 2014

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 2014 will work with the city's new leaders to make government more open, accountable, accessible and engaging to the people it serves. We will champion the public interest and ensure special interests don't unduly influence governmental decision-making.

We will first advocate for reforms of City Council rules that provide a meaningful role for rank-and-file members to more effectively represent their communities while balancing the need for a strong speaker. We will seek better administration of, and voter participation in, our city elections, and improved readability of ballots. We will take a position on non-citizen voting and continue to make the case that all voters and all candidates should participate in both the first and second rounds of voting. Citizens Union will seek to increase government transparency by ensuring robust implementation of the Open Data, Webcasting and Lobbying Laws, and more user-friendly budget documents. We will work with the new borough presidents to make community boards more effective avenues for meaningful public input.

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:

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- **Distribute expense and capital discretionary funding based on equity and need** to individual councilmembers, and **improve 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 play a greater role in choosing staff.
- **Establish an independent bill drafting commission that drafts legislation in a timely manner for any councilmember** and provides legal and fiscal implications for bills.
- **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.

ELECTION REFORM

- **Establish instant runoff voting** for citywide offices, borough presidents and the City Council.

ELECTION REFORM CONTINUED

- Achieve administrative changes to **ensure ballots better reflect the required languages of voters** and the **font size is increased for candidates' names and ballot questions.**
- **Improve accountability and transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York** by evaluating the Board using performance benchmarks set by the City Council or in the Mayor's Management Report, and through the **webcasting of Board meetings.**
- **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 election administration by creating a voluntary municipal poll worker program** to recruit qualified city employees to work on Election Day.
- **Expand voter education and encourage participation by broadening the Campaign Finance Board Voter Guide** to include all contests occurring in the city such as state and federal elections; and **requiring schools to give registration forms to parents** who enroll their children in school.
- **Ensure city agencies provide opportunities for eligible voters to register to vote when receiving** their routine services.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

- **Reduce the frequency with which the police tactic of stop, question and frisk is administered** and ensure it is done **judiciously with the utmost professionalism.**
- **Ensure the transfer of prosecutorial power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board allows for more effective and independent adjudication of police misconduct claims.**
- **Make the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) permanent** in the City Charter while **empowering it to issue subpoenas.**
- **Restore the quadrennial cycle of elected official compensation review.**
- **Reform 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 recent Lobbying Law reforms are implemented, making lobbying activity more transparent.**
- **Monitor city agencies' compliance with transparency laws** requiring proactive publishing of data, compliance plans for releasing data; and webcasting of public hearings and meetings.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- **Prohibit contributions bundled by lobbyists from receiving matching funds, and ban placement agents from bundling donations** for any elected official directly or indirectly.
- **Prohibit participants in the city's campaign finance program from using public matching funds to purchase strategic campaign consulting services** from firms that also lobby.
- **Further curb the outlay of public funds** to candidates facing minimal opposition.
- **Establish "war chest" restrictions** to limit the transfer of funds from one race to another.
- **Continue to monitor disclosure of independent expenditures in city elections.**

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. Release the non-property revenue projections prior to Council hearings on the Executive budget.

COMMUNITY BOARD REFORM

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

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.
- **Acknowledge 197-a plans by reconciling them with other development plans in strategic planning.**