



**CITIZENS UNION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
ELECTION 2009**

Citizens Union would appreciate your responses to the following questions related to policy issues facing the City of New York that are of concern to Citizens Union and the citizens of the City. We plan to make public your responses to this questionnaire in our Voters Directory, on our website, and in other appropriate venues. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union will use to evaluate candidates who are running for office in order to determine our "Preferred Candidates" for the primary election and "Endorsed Candidates" for the general election. In order to receive Citizens Union's "preferred" or "endorsed" status, in addition to completing the questionnaire, candidates must participate in an interview with Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee.

We thank you very much for your response.

Candidate Name: Yen S. Chou Age: 46

Office to Which You Seek Election: Council District #: 20

Campaign Address: 36-23 Prince Street, 2nd Floor, Flushing, New York 11354

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 353-4848 Fax: (718) 353-2211

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat Campaign Manager Name: Michael Olmeda

Website & Email: www.yenchou.com friends@yenchou.com

Education: Fu Jen Catholic University, B.S. in Statistics; St. Johns university, M.S. in Mathematics & Computer Science; Dartmouth University "Tuck Executive Education"

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Director of AIM Academy

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Pres. of the Chinese American Parent-Student Council of NYC; District Leader at Large of the Dem. Organization Queens County; Chair of the National Woman Advisory Council of International Leadership Foundation; Appointed Member of NYC Community Education Council; Elected CSB Member of District 26 (1999-2004); VP of HAKKA Association; Advisor of Queens District attorney Office Asian Advisory Board; Advisor of Indochina Sino-American Community Center

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES NO

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES NO

(Please note: Citizens Union can grant its "Preferred Candidate" and "Endorsed Candidate" rating only to candidates we have interviewed. We will make every effort to interview candidates in each race for City Council.)

Signature of Candidate:  Date: 7/17/09

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

Please state your position on the following issues by indicating whether you support or oppose each. You may elaborate in the space provided at the end or on additional paper.

VOTING AND ELECTIONS REFORM

1. **What is your position with respect to allowing voters who are registered as independents to vote in party primaries?**

Support. Open primaries help bring voices and diversity into the primary process. Allowing independents to vote in primaries will mean more qualified candidates and fewer party favorites. Both elections and primaries should be about the best candidate for the people and allowing independents to vote will bring us one step closer to that objective.

2. **What is your position on passage of state legislation that would allow referenda initiated by the City Council and/or the public to appear on the ballot at the same time as a referendum initiated by a charter commission appointed by the Mayor?**

Support. The Charter Commission is not the only organization that can put forward important suggestions for City Charter reform. Both the public and the City Council have a broad set of experiences and expertise that the City will benefit from if they were allowed to put their own referendum on the ballot at the same time as the charter commission to give voters a balanced set of different choices.

3. **What is your position on increasing the pay of Election Day poll workers above the current \$200 they are allotted per election event?**

Support. A large number of well compensated poll workers will ensure a clean election, accurate results, and hassle-free voting.

4. **What is your position on restructuring New York's current board of elections model to eliminate political party responsibility for overall election administration and replace it with a system that narrows political party involvement to certification of candidate petitions and the actual counting of votes?**

Support. The political process as it is now gives political parties too much influence and allows them to corrupt the election process. As a reform oriented candidate, I will fight to reduce the overwhelming influence of political parties and present voters with a selection of candidates not based on how many friends they have within the party but their overall qualification and history of community service.

5. **What is your position on having an election administration system where there is a local elections executive director appointed by the mayor upon recommendation by a new board that is chosen by the mayor and the city council?**

Support. The Board of Elections is unfortunately a party oriented organization not subject to public scrutiny. There is no meaningful representation of third parties on the Board of Elections. To create accountability and a fair election process I support creating an executive director to oversee the election administration system.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

6. **What is your position on implementing "war chest" restrictions that would prohibit a candidate from transferring funds raised in a previous election cycle into a current campaign committee for a different office?**

Support. Allowing a war chest to be transferred from one office to another corrupts the electoral process and gives certain candidates an unfair advantage. It is also inappropriate, allowing for donors to exceed maximum campaign contributions.

7. **What is your position on allowing campaign financing for ballot proposals?**

Support. Ballot proposals can sometimes involve very complex issues with powerful arguments on both sides. Whenever that happens, both sides need an opportunity to make the pros and cons of the ballot proposal known to the public. As Councilwoman I will fight for a campaign finance allotment devoted specifically for recognized organizations that are looking to distribute information on all disputed ballot proposals.

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

8. **What is your position on allowing Council committees to function more independently of the speaker than is presently the case?**

Support. As a Councilwoman I look forward to working alongside Speaker Quinn to bring about important citywide changes in policy. However I will also work alongside Speaker Quinn to help promote greater independence for the City Council as a whole so representatives can stay closer to the agenda of the people they represent.

- a. **Should committee staff be hired by and report to committee chairs?**

Support. The process of all committee staff being hired by the Speaker is an undemocratic process with a strong potential for abuse. Shifting the staff hiring from the Speaker to the Committee chairs is definitely a step in the right direction.

b. Should committee hearings and votes be scheduled at the direction of the chairs?

Support. As Councilwoman I will push for greater independence for committees and a more robust democratic process by having more influence placed in the hands of the many different committee chairs. That will go a long way towards increasing accountability and a better democracy.

c. Should committees be able to issue subpoenas by a vote of their members?

Support. The issuing of subpoenas is an important part of City Council research prior to passing important legislation. To transfer the power of issuing subpoenas to the individual Councilmembers through majority voting is a democratic move that will help pass better laws more quickly.

9. What is your position on:

a. limiting councilmembers' ability to earn outside income?

Support. As a Councilwoman I will make sure that everyone on the City Council understands that they are a Councilmember first and everything else second. The City Council is a full time commitment and limiting outside income is necessary to prevent conflicts of interest and the capture of Councilmen by outside parties.

b. making the job of councilmember a full-time position?

Support. For a City as large and as complex as New York, being a councilmember should definitely be a full-time position. As Councilwoman I will push for legislation that makes this a full time job, which means a full time salary but also full time responsibilities.

c. eliminating or limiting stipends for committee chairs and leadership positions?

Support.

10. What is your position on requiring that any future increase in councilmember compensation not affect those serving in the current term of the council and only be applied prospectively to the following term?

Support. Our councilmen and women should not be allowed to raise their own pay, especially in these trying economic times. As a councilwoman, if I feel that a pay raise is necessary on principle, not self interest, then I will gladly vote for a prospective pay raise for the next term.

11. What is your position on consolidating the current City Council committee structure and reducing the number of overall committees?

Support. At the moment there are over 30 different committees with overlapping legislative areas. The current state is highly undemocratic since it allows for a small committee with very few members to kill bills with wide-ranging city-wide impact. A more consolidated structure with fewer but larger committees will prevent that from happening.

12. What is your position on term limits for elected officials?

Support. Term limits is absolutely necessary. A combination of high incumbency rates and lack of term limits is an invitation to nepotism, corruption, and the destruction of the Democratic process.

13. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that changes to term limits may only be approved by the voters?

Support. I am a strong supporter of A1224-A (State) and Proposed Int. No. 850-A (City) that requires term limit changes to be approved directly by the electorate. Such an important issue that implicates the self-interest of all elected officials cannot be decided in the hands of those very same elected officials. As Councilwoman I will not allow 850-A to languish in the Committee on Governmental Operations and work hard to push this particular legislation through the Committee to be voted on by the general body.

14. What is your position on the recent extension of term limits for the city's elected officials to three consecutive four-year terms? Please explain your answer.

Oppose

First I oppose the term limits extension because it was done through the City Council and not by referendum. The people of New York should have had an opportunity to directly express their views and vote their opinions on this matter. It should not have been internally decided by the City Council.

Second, while I will not push for revoking the term limit changes, I would not have voted for them either had I been on the City Council. As stated earlier, Term Limits are important to preserving the Democratic Process.

POLICY ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

Please state your position on the following issues by indicating whether you support or oppose each, where applicable. Please also use the space provided below each question or on a separate sheet of paper to elaborate on your positions on the questions which require a detailed answer. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

15. **Knowing that the police department and commissioner retain ultimate authority for determining whether an officer is guilty and penalty, what is your position on transferring power to the Civilian Complaint Review Board to prosecute cases of police misconduct, such as force, abuse of authority, discourtesy, and offensive language?**

Support. A civilian review board will significantly reduce the likelihood of abuse of authority. The tight bond of loyalty among police officers will make it reluctant for the police department to "hand over" members of their own and only a civilian outside authority has the power to protect New York from its defenders.

16. **What is your position on changing the current land use process under ULURP to increase the role of community-based planning?**

Support. ULURP (Uniform Land Use Review Procedure) as it exists places a high emphasis on uniform procedures. However, good land use and development differs from community to community. To promote a better procedure, as Councilwoman I will revise ULURP to required the Department of City Planning to include community-based planning in all land use decision making.

17. **What is your position regarding the creation of a Charter Revision Commission to review specifically the roles of the various offices of government and how well government has functioned since the 1988 and 1989 charter review commissions?**

Support. For a decade now I have been a very close friend of David Weprin, having worked for him for several years on the City Council as a special aide. I know that he is among a small group of Councilmen who sponsored Int. No. 858 for establishing a Charter Revision Commission. Once in City Hall I will revitalize No. 858 and I intend to include among their responsibilities regular reports reviewing various offices of government to determine their effectiveness and necessity to City functioning.

18. **What is your position on reforming the current pension funding structure to create multiple tiers for future city government employees?**

Support.

- a. **In FY 2008-09, New York City spent \$12 billion on pensions and fringe benefits for City employees out of a total budget of \$62 billion. What would you do to address the growing pension costs borne by the city and New York City tax payers?**

As Councilwoman I will attempt to keep qualified City employees for as long as possible in the City's employ. I will support legislation that distinguishes between different reasons for retirement and attempt to coax old but still qualified employees to remain in service as paid employees instead of retiring and taking up pensions.

19. **What is your position with respect to the City Council passing a resolution calling upon the State Legislature to establish a State Constitutional Convention?**

Support**a. If support, what are the three most important areas that need improvement?**

Clearly the one area that has been highlighted by the recent circus in Albany is the necessity of for example an odd number of State Senators or clear provisions for the appointment of a Lieutenant Governor.

But in addition the State Constitutional Convention must recognize the value and importance of a Republican system of government (as guaranteed by our Federal Constitution) and implement measures such as constitutionally mandated term limits. The state government must be structured in such a way so elected representatives are constantly replaced, so that there is no place for nepotism or favoritism, and so power is widely distributed among a broad range of elected officials. (Res. No. 170)

b. Do you believe that greater home rule should be granted to the City of New York? If so, in what areas should further sovereignty be given?

One area where I feel home rule is appropriate is in the area of rent regulation. I feel it is both inappropriate and undemocratic for local decisions regarding rent regulation to be decided in Albany and not New York City. I believe the Urstadt Law that precludes New York City from strengthening our own rent regulation policy as is our prerogative is a gross injustice and I would be proud to continue sending resolutions to the State government until the situation changes.

But on a broader level, any policy issue that affects only the citizens of New York, perhaps except for civil rights issues, is a policy that should be decided on the local level by citizens closest to the point of impact. How can we expect a State Senator from Buffalo to understand the difficulties being faced by a resident of Elmhurst? So in addition to rent regulation any policy without far reaching out of state implications should be under the jurisdiction of the City Council.

20. Taking into consideration the lessons learned from the debates surrounding congestion pricing and the Ravitch Commission's recommendations to provide the MTA with long-term funding, what would you propose to address the MTA's fiscal solvency issues and ensure that the burden for funding the MTA is equitably distributed among all stakeholders?

The Stakeholders of the MTA includes not only the straphangers but also the businesses that rely on the MTA to bring employees and customers to and from store locations on a daily business. The MTA fiscal crisis cannot and should not be solved by solely relying on fare hikes or service cuts. That was in fact what made the Ravitch Commission recommendations so impressive since it recognized the importance of distributing the burden equally. The "mobility tax" for example is a great idea I since without a smooth functioning MTA, the streets, bridges, and tunnels of New York would suffer from back to back traffic every day of the week.

But the most important aspect of the Ravitch Commission recommendation that I will stand for once on the City Council is the removal of politics from MTA governance. As councilwoman I will sponsor resolutions that demand the State government introduce automatic fare and toll increases based on inflation to avoid politicizing an unpopular but necessary part of keeping the MTA solvent.

21. What would you propose in terms of creating a greater role for the city council in determining and deciding the city budget?

The creation of the initial budget should be a collaborate effort between the City Council and the Mayor's office. Furthermore, as Councilwoman I will sponsor legislation that will move up the timetable so the City Council has more time to consult with electorates and examine and dissect a complex budget. Given the fiscal year begins in July, and that it should take at least 4 months for the City Council to make well researched, well informed decisions, what the City Council needs is a preliminary budget at the beginning of April on which they will have time to deliberate at length.

22. What is your position regarding the City's past practice of using surplus tax revenues to pay down future health cost and pension obligations, and the decision not to do so this year?

The practice of paying down future health costs and pension obligations is in fact a rather new approach towards using a budget surplus, started by Michael Bloomberg in 2006. This was a fiscally responsible approach, and had it not been for Bloomberg's foresight, we might have been in a much direr fiscal situation today. Wasteful spending on special interests is a natural consequence of corrupt Tammany Hall style politics. As Councilwoman I will support legislation that required a portion of surplus tax revenues to pay down future costs and obligations, rather than being diverted to pet projects or corrupt special interests.

Unfortunately this year's fiscal crunch, and the likely continued fiscal shortfall will make this particular legislation a moot point as it might be some time before New York faces a budget surplus again. But that is no excuse for a lack of preparation and as Councilwoman I promise to make responsible fiscal decisions, fighting back cronyism and other corrupt political practices.

23. What is your view of how the taxes paid by New Yorkers compare to the value that is received in City services? Do you believe that taxes should be raised or lowered? To the extent you believe taxes should be changed, please provide specific proposals about what taxes you would raise and what services you would cut, if you didn't raise taxes, listed in order of greatest magnitude.

For the most part I believe New Yorkers do receive City services comparable to the value of the taxes they pay. Although there is some extraneous spending that is the natural result of patronage style politics, overall the majority of tax revenue collected goes toward vital services that keep the City running. However that being said, it is dangerous at this moment to raise taxes. Our economic development is in a precarious situation and raising taxes now might jeopardize the economic growth we need to get New York out of its present recession.

Proper management of City finances requires careful targeted tax raises followed by careful targeted service cuts aimed at cutting away the City's allocation to special projects and pork related expenses. Governor Patterson's proposed tax increase on high sugar drinks for example and other similar excise taxes represent one route towards increasing revenue.

While I am not sure what services I would cut, I am certain about what services I would not cut. One example is the public advocate's office. I feel the 40% cut of the public advocate's office is a travesty

of justice that jeopardizes the checks and balances of New York City Governance and that their budget must be immediately restored. The Public Advocate's office must not be punished for opposing term limits and that particular office must be maintained to effectively counter anti-democratic trends in New York government.

- 24. Many policy advocates champion the creation of a more diversified economy, and one that is less reliant on Wall Street. What is your position on such a plan? If you support it, what would you do to diversify the city's economy? How would you adjust spending in New York City to accommodate the anticipated reduction in tax revenue as the tax base shifts to lower paying jobs?**

New York is, and will probably continue to remain, the finance capital of America. However, as the recent financial meltdown demonstrates it is dangerous for any City to rely on only one industry. I agree with these policy advocates for the creation of a more diversified economy. I will sponsor and support legislation that will attract different industries into New York City. With over 7 million people, we have the manpower and the resources to attract any number of different industry and industry types.

As Councilwoman I will for example support a New York City version of S5519 that further reduces taxes for unincorporated business owners to encourage as much entrepreneurship and innovative business models as possible, as an investment in New York City small business community and in New York City's future. As for the shift in tax base, I believe it will only be temporary. As the Goldman Sach profit surge demonstrates, the finance sector is in bound for a recovery and soon Wall Street will be bustling again.

- 25. What would you propose the Department of Education do to increase the ability for parents and teachers to become more meaningfully involved in the education system? What other positives changes can be made to the New York City public school system?**

The Department of Education must encourage parents' access to student progress. I support the Mayor and Chancellor Klein's recent initiative to integrate more technology into the education system. There should be information about attendance, test results, and evaluations available online, so that parents can readily evaluate how their children are doing without being forced to rely on children's reports or inefficiently taking time to speak to teachers. Recurring problems, such as a string of missed classes or subject struggles, can also be addressed more quickly when such information is available.

As for parental involvement it is important for decisions about education to be made on the local level. In fact, local involvement is one of the cornerstones of my platform. As Councilwoman I will in fact write and sponsor legislation that requires certain education decisions be made at the local level by the parents and teachers who understand their children and students best. Central authority has limited effectiveness when it comes to certain issues and should be replaced instead by local boards with representatives from the PTA.

There is another overhaul of the education system that I would support. There has been evidence suggesting that the very long summer break is an inefficient conglomeration of students' time off. I would support restructuring the school year so that the same amount of break time is more evenly

distributed; the need for students to refresh and recharge has to be balanced with the harmful effects of a prolonged stoppage of learning, which most parents without the resources to access specialized summer education are powerless to mitigate.

26. What would you propose to increase the transparency of the Board of Elections in the City of New York's operations and accountability to the city and its voters?

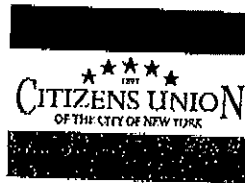
One essential element of the voting process is ensuring the accurate counting of the votes themselves. Tabulating votes using software for the sake of efficiency is a measure that has resulted in the need for constant recounts and inaccuracies, and I support reform that would return us fully to paper or lever ballots, which can be directly supervised and counted quickly. Not only would we increase the efficiency of the process that is consistently lost during software balloting crises, but we could afford to pay more for Board of Elections workers' vigilance and service on these most important democratic functions.

The Board of Elections is a bi-partisan organization but unfortunately bi-partisan does not protect the interest of third parties or the independent party. Furthermore the election system as it exists gives too much power to parties instead of voters and offers the electorate a very limited number of qualified candidates to choose from. As Councilwoman I will write resolutions requesting drastic changes in public accountability on the State level as well as pass legislation on the City level. I will support an executive director as well as higher pay and compensatory time for poll workers. I will advocate for an independent commission to ensure the validity of elections and supervise the primary system.

27. What would you propose to further enhance transparency regarding the relationships between council members, their families, and nonprofits that receive funding from New York City?

The resignation of Miguel Martinez is an unfortunate incidence that could have been prevented had there been greater transparency within the City Council. Another unfortunate recent incident was what happened involving Councilman Stewart's staff. It is important that we build greater transparency by creating a regular and verifiable reporting system. Councilmen and their staff must keep New Yorkers informed about where their tax money is going and what non-profit organizations they support.

I support a public and publicized online database that keeps this important information widely available to any interested member of the public so our elected representatives, including myself, will always be subject to public scrutiny.



CANDIDATE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Citizens Union is adding a new element to its evaluation of candidates running for office. As a candidate who presently does not hold elected office, CU is interested in knowing your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position.

If elected, Citizens Union will use these promises to evaluate your performance while in office, as well as, to evaluate your candidacy in the future.

We thank you very much for your response. Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. Promise not to make promises and keep to my commitments
2. Work to expand the Health Care Security Act
3. Continuation of Mayoral Control with modification including emphasis on increased parental involvement and independent fiscal oversight
4. Negotiate binding agreements with developers receiving City subsidies
5. Ensure adequate funding for our primary necessities