



CITIZENS UNION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
ELECTION 2009

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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: Helen SEARS Age: _____

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 25

Campaign Address: 74-09 37th Ave Rm #413 JACK HTS, NY 11372

Campaign Telephone Number: (917) 692-1975 Fax: (718) 496-6572

Party Affiliation(s): Dem. Campaign Manager Name: SWANT SEARS

Website & Email: SEARS4COUNCIL.COM

Education: _____

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): 7th grad w

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: _____

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: Helen Sears Date: 7-27-09

I. 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 | Oppose |
| 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 | Oppose |
| 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 | Oppose |
| 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 | Oppose |
| 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 | Oppose |

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 | Oppose |
|---|---------|--------|

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

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 Oppose

a. Should committee staff be hired by and report to committee chairs? Support Oppose

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

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

9. What is your position on:

a. limiting councilmembers' ability to earn outside income? Support Oppose

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

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

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 Oppose

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

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

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 Oppose

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.

Support Oppose

I VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE EXTENSION BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT CAPITAL PROJECTS, OF WHICH MY DISTRICT HAS SEVERAL, REQUIRE 10-12 YEARS OF A MEMBERS ACTIVE SUPPORT TO SUCCESSFULLY MOVE FROM ~~THE~~ CONCEPT TO REALITY.

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 Oppose

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

Support Oppose

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 Oppose

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

Support Oppose

- 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?

There is no easy fix to the pension problem. Sacrifices must be made on all sides, and I am committed to seeing that every group gets a fair hearing as we address the issue.

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

Oppose

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

- 1) review rules of succession and how to avoid the recent mess in Albany
- 2) review whether the state can intervene in a municipality's right to control housing policy
- 3) review the use of eminent domain

- 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?

Yes, I believe the city should be given much greater sovereignty, particularly surrounding the issue of housing. We must repeal the vestment laws that have negatively affected our city.

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?

We must all work together to equitably disperse the responsibility for our mass transit. We must devise a plan that equally distributes the burden between upstate and downstate, and across the 5 boroughs.

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

The Council currently is able to vote on any proposed budget, and we take this duty ~~very~~ very seriously. ~~The only change I would make is taking a hard look at member items at council levels or oversight.~~ The only change I would make is taking a hard look at member items at council levels or oversight.

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?

I believe strongly in doing so, and believe we should use this surplus to pay down ~~the~~ debt and obligations whenever possible. The last year was a special case due to the tough economy, and it was not possible to pay down future obligations.

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.

I believe that generally our tax system is fair. I would look at our property tax formulas and see how they can be adjusted, especially as it relates to co-op owners.

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?

Diversification is necessary for survival. We need to incentivize small businesses, independent workers, and members of the so-called "creative class." Innovation is the key to survival, and we must ensure that our city's creativity can flourish.

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 positive changes can be made to the New York City public school system?

I would propose that ~~there~~ more room be made in the policy-making part of DOE for parents and teachers.

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?

Creating a more user-friendly website at the CEB would be a good start, and possibly moving toward more involvement between BOE and web technologies that ~~can~~ help bring government to the people.

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?

I believe the Speaker's efforts at reform are long overdue, and I would ~~like~~ like track of their success or failure in this last budget before making further recommendations.

CANDIDATE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Citizens Union is adding a new element to its evaluation of incumbents running for re-election. In addition to evaluating their stances on the issues above, Citizens Union will assess incumbents on how well they kept the promises they made to voters during the previous election.

As an elected official who is seeking re-election,

- a. what were the top five promises you made to your constituents when you ran for your current position and what progress have you made to keep those promises, and why and why not have you met them?
- b. what are your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position?

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

TOP FIVE CAMPAIGN PROMISES FROM 2005 AND ACTION ON THEM

1. ~~On~~ ~~the~~ Increase health care
 funded and saw to completion Hope Center
 Pavilion at Elmhurst hospital
2. close the gap between people and local
 government. Held ~~no~~ ~~over~~ ~~23~~ term bills
3. ~~_____~~
4. _____
5. _____

TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. Increase Affordable Housing Stock
2. Increase amount of green space in my district
3. Increase access to quality, affordable health ~~care~~ care, including primary care
4. Continue to bring cutting edge technology into the classroom
5. ~~Continue efforts~~ Help small businesses in this tough economic time and get more workforce development programs for unemployed workers.