



**CITIZENS UNION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
PUBLIC ADVOCATE
ELECTION 2009**

Citizens Union would appreciate your response 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: Alex T. Zablocki

Age: 26

Campaign Address: 103 Surfside Plaza, Staten Island, NY 10307

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 734-1093 Fax: n/a

Party Affiliation(s): Republican Campaign Manager Name: n/a

Website & Email: www.alex2009.com alex@alex2009.com

Education: Bachelor's Degree, Finance and Investments, Baruch College (CUNY)

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Director of Land Use, 51st Council District, NYC Council (2003-2007); District Director, 24th District, NYS Senate (2007-present); Small business owner (2001-present)

Previous Offices and Campaigns: n/a

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" or "Endorsed Candidate" rating only to candidates we have interviewed. We will make every effort to interview candidates in this race.)

Signature of Candidate:

Date: 7-29-09

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.

1. 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

2. What is your position on the passage of state legislation that would allow for other charter measures, such as those initiated by the City Council or by citizens, to appear on the ballot at the same time as when there is a charter reform proposal initiated by a charter commission appointed by the Mayor?

Support

Oppose

3. 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

4. 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

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

Support

Oppose

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

Support

Oppose

7. 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

7. 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

The voters of New York City went to the voting booth twice to require term limits for elected officials. The term limit laws set forth at that time are adequate and the City Council/Mayor acted improperly by extending term limits to three consecutive four-year terms. This should have been put in front of voters as a referendum. I vigorously fought the term-limits extension and helped collect petition signatures through a website my campaign created, TermLimits.info to lobby the City Council to vote down the measure.

8. How would you use the office of the Public Advocate to impact public policy in the City to serve the broad public interest?

The Public Advocates office has been under attack for quite some time. Most recently, the office has faced a 40% funding cut by the City Council/Mayor and just this week, Councilman Simcha Felder submitted legislation to eliminate the position. I firmly believe that this office is an important office for the residents of New York City. With that said, this office should be strengthened, not made weaker by the very people the Public Advocate is in office to watch over. The way I would use this office to impact public policy in New York City would be to 1. Straighten the office by working with the City Council and Mayor to make the budget of the Public Advocate independent; 2. I would seek a revision in the City Charter to give the Public Advocate subpoena power, something that has been talked about for over a decade, but no action was ever taken. This would put more teeth into the Public Advocates ability to affect change in New York City; 3. I would use the Public Advocates ability to submit legislation, when necessary, to force certain legislative changes to make government work more efficiently; 4. As the mandated watchdog over the Mayor and City Council, I would use the position to focus on

government waste, corruption, inefficiencies and lack of transparency, and using this citywide office effectively, make government more accountable to taxpayers; 5. I would decentralize the office and have a satellite office in every borough, including one in northern Manhattan. I would also work closely with the Community Boards and groups like Citizen's Union and NYPIRG to work on reform measures to make New York City government more accountable.

9. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as public advocate?

Legislative:

- Submit legislation to create an independent budget process for the Public Advocate's office
- Submit legislation to revise the City Charter to give the Public Advocate subpoena power
- Submit legislation to lower the real property tax rate to give relief to home owners
- Submit legislation that would require the MTA to install bike racks on buses that serve two or more boroughs (i.e. S79 between Staten Island and Brooklyn)
- Submit legislation to make the position of City Council member a full-time position
- Submit legislation to reform the laws of the Campaign Finance Board to hold unions to the same standards as people "doing business" with the city
- Submit legislation to reform the laws of the Campaign Finance Board to allow citywide candidates to participate in debates regardless of how much money they raise
- Submit legislation creating a "One City, One Toll" program, similar to the MTA's one city, one fare program for MetroCard. "One City, One Toll" would credit motorists for the highest toll paid on an MTA tunnel and/or bridge within two hours, against the lower toll
- Submit legislation to eliminate the 4% city tax, as authorized by New York State, on home heating fuels

Non-Legislative

- Bring energy and independence to the office of Public Advocate to fulfill the Public Advocates main duty of assisting residents with getting access to city services and my commitment to solve problems within days, not weeks.
- Through investigations and reports I would issue to the Mayor and City Council, make government more accountable by suggesting ways for government to work more efficiently, including ways to cut government waste
- Revamping of the Voter Assistance Commission (VAC), which the Public Advocate is an ex-officio member on, renaming it to the Civic Involvement and Voting Improvement Commission (CIVIC) and reforming its mission. The new commission would continue the efforts of the VAC, while also offering ballot access services, publishing a non-partisan guide to running for office, devise a NYS Election Law curriculum, along with CUNY, to be offered at Baruch College's School of Public Affairs, make CIVIC more accountable by reporting findings on low voter turnout, voter registration and youth involvement in the political process, to the City Council Governmental Operations Committee annually and non-profit groups to suggest ways election laws, ballot access, voter turnout and voter registration could be improved in New York City, just to name a few points. (*also legislative*)
- Advocate for election law reform in New York State, including ballot access reform
- Improve access to 311 data as well as Community Board data, through recommendation as a member of the Commission on Public Information and Communication
- Reform the office of Public Advocate, by partnering with Borough President and Community Board offices across the city to share data and create a satellite office in every borough.
- Appoint at least one representative from my staff to every borough; hire lawyers to offer free legal assistance; ensure my staff is diverse, multilingual and properly trained, including hiring social workers and education professionals
- Catalog all cellular towers by number and, through recommendation as a member of the Commission on Public Information and Communication, ask DoITT to place these locations on the new NYC Map (GIS) program at NYC.gov

- Work with the Department of Health to track possible health affects of cellular towers on surrounding communities through a voluntary health registry
- Organize five traffic and transprotation task force committees (one for each borough), made up of elected officials and community representatives, to discuss possible improvements in traffic and public trasnportation in local communities
- Appoint a City Planning Commissioner that will be a strong voice against overdevelopment and as well a strong voice for smart development, including affordable housing for low and middle income families when developers seek zoning changes
- Fight MTA fare hikes and offer solutions to fill budget gaps at the MTA, including reforms of the MTA itself
- Help expand programs that get illegal guns off the street by working with District Attorney office's and the corporate sector, including the music industry
- Work with the Mayor, the City Council, State Legislators and NYS/NYC EDC to create a green economic development zone to bring new industries and jobs to New York City
- Fight for small businesses to lower taxes, cut red tape and help them navigate New York City regulations
- Reach out to the private sector to create new programs to bring money to schools and libraries across New York City
- Work with CUNY to create a "Tuition Lock" program that would allow full-time students to lock in the tuition they pay when starting school, for four years, so they aren't hit with large tuition hikes
- Digitalize, over 4-years, nearly every aspect of city government, including giving all New Yorker's a virtual mailbox on NYC.gov to reduce waste and save money
- Be an active Public Advocate by regularly sitting on City Council committee's, as the City Charter allows, and giving all residents, from all five boroughs, a seat at the table in City Hall

10. What are the three most important oversight functions of the Public Advocate?

- 1: Charter mandated ombudsman service, which allows the Public Advocate to investigate parts of government independent from the Mayor, Comptroller and City Council and submit those findings, with possible solutions to make government work more efficiently, to the City Council and Mayor, as well as the public/media
- 2: Trustee on the board of NYCERS, New York City's largest retirement pension system, giving the Public Advocate a full vote when it comes to ensuring pension investments and retiree benefits are protected, independently
- 3: As a member of the Independent Budget Office Advisory Board, the Public Advocate has significant input on the selection of a Director of the Independent Budget Office, which ensures a qualified, independent director is chosen to save taxpayers money and help make government work more efficiently

11. How would you leverage the office of the Public Advocate to address:

- a. Affordable Housing,
 - b. Education,
 - c. Budget and Fiscal Responsibility,
 - d. Health and the Environment, and
 - e. Economic Development?
-
- a. I would be a strong advocate for affordable housing for low and middle income families/individuals. The best way to leverage the office to address affordable housing is by appointing a strong advocate to the City Planning Commission that would have a vote on land use matters and fight for affordable housing when developers seek zoning changes.
 - b. Working with parents across the city, I would hold forums on public education in all five boroughs, quarterly. The Public Advocate gets to appoint a representative to the Citywide Council on Special Education as well, which would be my voice on this council for special needs students. I would also use my position as an ex-officio member on the board of the Museum of the City of New York to create a local history (city and borough) curriculum for fifth grade public school students.
 - c. My office will have dedicated staff investigating government waste and the fiscal responsibility (or irresponsibility) of our Mayor and City Council. I would use my

complains – nearly all of these were city related, but many were not. If people need help, they need somewhere to go and the Public Advocate’s office is the one place they can go for independent assistance in getting issues resolved. A good Public Advocate understands all issues, on many different levels, and is best informed when handling complaints on broad citywide issues.

13. How would you publicize the Public Advocate’s office and its role?

The Public Advocate’s office must enter the 21st Century. My office of Public Advocate would utilize Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and other Web 2.0 technologies like the ones I have been using throughout my campaign. This will give people instant access to the office and make their experience more interactive. I would also decentralize the office and have one office in every borough, including northern Manhattan – the current setup of the office, being housed in the Municipal Building, doesn’t work. *The most effective, responsible and responsive government is government closest to the people.* I will appoint at least one representative to each borough and would start a volunteer staff, made up of Community Board Members and others, to be the offices’ eyes and ears in every community. Finally, I would continue Public Advocate Gotbaum’s non-profit Fund for Public Advocacy to supplement the costs of the office to print brochures and reports for the public to educate them about the office and issues.

14. 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?

Mayoral Control works – the results speak for themselves – but the lack of parental involvement is troubling. Parents must have more of a say in their childrens education and parents must be involved in the school community. As I said above, as Public Advocate I would hold parental forums on education in all five boroughs. Parents should be partners with the school system, not outsiders, and they shouldn’t be getting involved in their children’s education after a report card is issued. As Public Advocate I would ensure that ever school administrator and teacher was accessible through email and have a dedicated staff of educational professionals to assist parents with problems regarding the Department of Education. I would also advocate for better funding from the State of New

York for education, more school choice, expansion of Charter Schools if a community wants them, there is a need and money isn't taken away from existing schools, technology for every child (i.e. laptops, computers, Smart Boards in classrooms) and smaller class size. Throughout the campaign I have also spoken about advocating for better physical education programs and art/music programs in public schools – and if funding was a problem, I vow to reach out to the private sector if elected to bring these types of programs to schools.

15. 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 do you think should be done to address the MTA's fiscal solvency issues and ensure that the burden for funding the MTA are equitably distributed amongst all stakeholders?

I favored congestion pricing because it would have provided much needed revenue to the MTA, it would have led to real public transportation improvements and would have had a minimal financial impact on the residents of New York City. With this said, I do not support tolls on the East and Harlem River crossings, if the money collected would go into a general fund, not intended for transportation improvements in the five boroughs. As a Staten Island resident, I know all too well about the burden of high tolls from the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. The majority of the tolls collected from this bridge go to fund the Long Island Railroad. This is not equitable. Staten Island, like many other parts of the city, is in dire need of mass transit improvements yet the MTA does not allocate its resources efficiently.

The MTA must be overhauled. I have called for the complete abolishment of the MTA – I believe when something is broken it must be fixed. The management at the MTA failed New York. The MTA should be broken into manageable pieces allowing elected officials and consultants to look for waste and see what divisions operate most efficiently. This isn't something one piece of legislation could fix or something that will be fixed overnight. The MTA has been on the wrong track for decades and we need all elected officials to come together to fix this very broken agency.

Money must come from somewhere. Riders should never be overly burdened with fare hikes and laws should be in place to prevent wild swings in fares every year or two. I do not support a payroll tax to fund the MTA. There has to be a better way to help the MTA with its budget while providing a great service and expanding service. All of these solutions must come from the state and federal government.

16. What would you propose to ensure that charter mandated elected offices receive equitable budget allocations?

The office of Public Advocate should have an independently set budget, apart from the Mayor or City Council. All City Council office and budget allocations should be equal as well. No favors should be given because an elected official voted the right way or was registered to one political party versus another. A Charter Revision Commission should be convened in 2010 to discuss the important issue of equitable budget allocations. If legislation did not pass to determine the budget of the Public Advocate independently, then the budget should be equally set to the office budget of the Speaker of the City Council.

17. How would you propose the city deal with the affordable housing?

The old style of affordable housing is institutional and doesn't work. As Public Advocate I would like to reach out to tenant associations of public housing complexes to make life better for those residents. Many public housing complexes across the city are beautiful, but many more fail residents and offer no chance to families who want to move to better housing. Beyond my outreach, public housing should have some social component on site – this is something I would like to work on as Public Advocate.

Affordable housing should be part of major development plans and mixed with other types of housing. I believe affordable housing should mean affordable housing for low and middle income families/individuals and either rentals or for purchase. As Public Advocate I get to appoint a commissioner to the City Planning Commission and my appointee would work with developers seeking zoning changes to ensure that all new housing developments where a builder receives a beneficial zoning change would have a certain amount of affordable housing units.

If we don't advocate for and provide affordable housing, we will squeeze out the middle-class and be left with the very rich and the very poor. Affordable housing is the key to a diverse and vibrant city. As Public Advocate I would help make current public housing better and advocate for creating more units of affordable housing.

18. What would you propose to further enhance transparency regarding the relationships

between elected officials, their families, and nonprofits that receive funding from New York City?

All elected officials are required to file a financial disclosure form with the Conflicts of Interest Board and these forms should be available online. Secondly, I called for stronger Campaign Finance Laws to prevent pay-to-play politics, after a report by the Daily News suggested nonprofit groups were donating large campaign contributions to elected officials that were allocating money to their groups. This has to end. We need a central database that includes the possible conflicts between elected officials, their budget items and campaign contributions. Currently, most of this information is available through the City Council, NYS Board of Elections, Campaign Finance Board and through Project Sunlight NY. The problem is that these databases are not connected and there should be one central database that could easily “connect the dots” to better show possibly conflicts. Transparency is one of the most important issue facing New York City residents, especially in light of recent City Council indictments as part of the “Slush Fund Scandal”. If elected Public Advocate, I would work on making government more transparent and accountable.

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. I promise to be an independent voice for you, regardless of where you live or what issue you bring to my office; I will hold forums in every neighborhood in all five boroughs to listen to your concerns and help make government work more efficiently**
- 2. I promise to help struggling New Yorker's by advocating for good paying jobs,**

affordable housing and lower taxes and fees; I will never support tax increases and legislation that hurt working families and small business owners; I will be a strong voice for mom-and-pop shops

3. I promise to be your voice on a citywide level to fight for better education for our children and involve parents in changing our public school system; I will also advocate for young professionals to make college more affordable and ensure that tuition increases don't force them out of school
4. I promise to decentralize the office of Public Advocate and bring government closer to you; I will hold my own office accountable and reform the office to make it work for all residents
5. I promise to help ease traffic and advocate for better mass transit options in every borough; I will listen to your thoughts and involve you in the process by creating a traffic and transportation task force in every borough