



**2012 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR
CANDIDATES FOR NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE**

Citizens Union would appreciate your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing New York State and our interest in reforming state government. 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 September 13th Primary Election, and our "Endorsed Candidates" for the November 6th General Election.

If you seek our support, we would also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. We will not automatically schedule an interview with you if you return this questionnaire, as we prioritize competitive races and resources constrain us from evaluating all races. Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed.

We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, Voters Directory and other appropriate venues. We thank you very much for your response.

Candidate Name: Aravella Simotas Age: 33

Campaign Address: 21-77 31st Street Astoria, NY 11105

Campaign Telephone Number: (347) 610-6373 Fax: () _____

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat Campaign Manager Name: Loren Amor

Website & Email: www.aravellasimotas.com, friendsofaravella@gmail.com

Education: B.A., J.D. Fordham University

Occupation/ Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Elected in 2010

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: United Community Civic Association

Board of Directors, Queens Community Board 1 Member

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES NO
(Please note: Citizens Union can grant its "Endorsed Candidate" rating only to candidates we have interviewed.)

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES NO

Signature of Candidate: *Aravella Simotas* Date: 7/12/2012

I. CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

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

ELECTION REFORM

1. What is your position on second passage of the constitutional amendment (S.6698/A.9526 of 2012) creating an independent redistricting commission with appointees split evenly between the majority and minority parties?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
2. What is your position on restructuring the state Board of Elections and changing the administration of elections by amending the constitution to abolish the two-party system of governance and operation?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
3. What is your position on making it easier for candidates to appear on the ballot by, for example, lowering signature requirements and utilizing less burdensome witness signature requirements?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
4. What is your position on amending the Municipal Home Rule law to limit the ability of a mayor-appointed charter revision commission to "bump" other local charter amendments from appearing on the ballot?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
5. What is your position on automatically granting New Yorkers on parole the ability to vote?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
6. What is your position on amending the constitution to allow for Election Day Registration?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
7. What is your position on amending the constitution to allow for no-excuse absentee voting?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
8. What is your position on instituting early voting in New York State to allow voters to cast their votes at more convenient times?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
9. What is your position on redesigning the ballot to ensure that voters are able to clearly read candidates' names, titles of offices, designations and ballot questions; that instructions are clear and accurate; that bilingual ballots are required; and that the ballot is able to split races between multiple pages?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
10. What is your position on reforming the special election process, creating a nonpartisan special election for state legislative vacancies, as proposed by A.1369/S.26?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
11. What is your position regarding automatic voter registration in which voter registration information of individuals who consent to be registered is provided electronically to the Board of Elections, and address information is automatically updated?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

12. What is your position on establishing a matching public financing system for state legislative and statewide races similar to the New York City model?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
13. What is your position on lowering campaign contribution limits for legislative and statewide candidates for public office?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
14. What is your position on restricting campaign contributions from registered lobbyists, placement agents and those who do business with the state?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
15. What is your position on limiting or banning campaign contributions from corporations, LLCs, and LLPs? (Note: such entities would be able to form separate political action committees due to constitutional issues regarding freedom of speech.)	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
16. What is your position on closing "soft money" loopholes such as limiting transfers from party committees to candidates or other committees to twice the limit set on individual contributors and limiting contributions to party committees, including housekeeping accounts, to the same ceiling placed on candidates?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
17. What is your position on requiring candidates to include full name, home address, and employer/business name for each contribution and bundler?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM (CONTINUED)

18. What is your position on requiring that two periodic campaign finance reports be filed during the legislative session to reflect contributions given during the session?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
19. What is your position on stricter requirements on the use of campaign contributions for non-campaign related activity, such as personal use?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
20. What is your position on improving disclosure of independent expenditures such as requiring disclosure of electioneering activities and linking expenditures to candidates targeted?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
21. What is your position on limiting the ability of candidates to accumulate "war chests" and then transferring funds raised in one race to another?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
22. What is your position on creating an enforcement entity independent of the State Board of Elections to oversee campaign finance laws?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

JUDICIAL REFORM

23. What is your position on a merit-based appointment system through creation of a commission for the selection of judges in all of New York's trial courts?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
24. What is your position simplifying and modernizing the state's court system by consolidating the nine trial courts into a two-tiered system?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

ETHICS REFORM

25. What is your position on empowering the Attorney General to investigate and prosecute cases involving public corruption, including serious election law malfeasance?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
26. What is your position on amending the State 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 apply to future state employees?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

BUDGET REFORM

27. What is your position on requiring the governor's budget submission to present the full scope of the state's financial obligations, including its public authorities?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
28. What is your position on establishing an independent, nonpartisan budget office to provide revenue projections, display economic and policy analysis and require that the state engage in long term, multi-year budget planning?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
29. What is your position on the use of Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) rather than cash accounting for the state budget?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
30. What is your position on distributing member item allocations equally among all legislators and requiring for greater accountability as expressed in S.1681A/A.00855?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
31. What is your position on incorporating the use of performance budgeting and outcome measurement to promote the more rational appropriation of state funds?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
32. What is your position on instituting a later start date for the state fiscal year?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
33. What is your position on limiting 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?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

ADDITIONAL REFORM

34. What is your position on increasing public access to information by reforming the Freedom of Information and Open Meetings Laws to enhance transparency, as well as the creation of tools such as open data portals to ease public access to information?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>
35. What is your position on enactment of legislative rules reform to strengthen rank-and-file members' roles in the legislative process and create more equity between members?	<u>Support/Oppose</u>

II. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS (PAST AND CURRENT)

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 seat and what progress has been made in keeping those promises, and
- b. what are the top five promises you are making to the voters during this campaign?

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 2010 AND ACTION ON THEM

1. Protect Western Queens' Environment: The power plants in my district provide roughly 60 percent of New York's power and have posed a danger to our community's public health for decades. As a community activist, I helped lead the fight to close one of the worst-polluting facilities – the Poletti Power Plant. As an Assemblymember, I have been named the chair of Smart Power NY, a coalition of elected officials, companies, labor groups and environmental advocates dedicated to producing clean energy in Western Queens. During my first term, I have vehemently opposed energy projects that would increase toxic emissions – efforts which resulted in one company reapplying for Department of Environmental Protection permits to reduce the emissions caps on their projects - while working with energy companies who are willing to upgrade their facilities to make them more environmentally-friendly.
2. Strengthening Our Schools: As a product of the New York City public school system, I have helped lead the fight against the Department of Education's efforts to close William Cullen Bryant and Long Island City high schools, western Queens institutions that serve thousands of local students, including many English Language Learners and students with special needs. I have also worked with community advocates to urge the state education department to maintain foreign language programs and standardized tests.
3. Advocate for Consumers and Small Businesses: I have been an outspoken opponent of the proposed merger between pharmacy industry titans Express Scripts and Medco, pharmaceutical benefits management companies (PBMs) that set drug prices and reimbursement rates. The merger would result in a near-monopoly and result in higher drug prices for consumers and make it extremely difficult for local, independently-owned pharmacies to compete with gigantic corporations. I have also introduced legislation to make health code regulations more transparent so that small

restaurants are able to comply with regulations without constantly being subject to costly, often arbitrary fines.

4. Change the Way Albany Works: I ran for office with the intention of rebuilding New Yorkers' trust in state government and combating the partisan gridlock and corruption that had become all-too prevalent in Albany in recent years. I was proud to be part of a legislature that passed the first on-time state budget in years, passed landmark ethics reform legislation and found bipartisan agreement on historic legislation to achieve marriage equality, install a progressive tax code and cut taxes for the middle class for the first time in nearly 60 years, and begin the process of digging New York out of a grinding economic recession. I also continue to be an advocate for an independent, nonpartisan redistricting system.
5. Improve Health Care in Western Queens: A central part of my campaign platform in 2010 was expanding Mount Sinai Queens hospital to better accommodate a growing community. As Assemblymember, I have supported Mount Sinai's efforts to acquire regulatory approval for expansion, writing letters with and speaking to state health officials. I have written op-eds and spoken at dozens of community events about the crisis in Queens' emergency rooms, where wait times average over four hours and are among the worst in the country. I also successfully lobbied the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to set up prescription medication drop-off points in my district so that residents could properly dispose of drugs and keep them out of our water supply and away from children.

TOP FIVE 2012 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. Fight for Women, Children and Families: I will fight to pass the New York Family Leave Act, legislation I authored that would extend maternity leave in the state from 12 to 24 weeks. I will also fight to pass several bills I have introduced aimed at increasing penalties on sex offenders.
2. Enhance Consumer Protections for Seniors: I will continue to advocate for protections that prevent utility companies from turning off heat and electricity during the winter months, a practice that endangers the wellbeing of New Yorkers, especially senior citizens. I will promote regulatory and legislative changes that make state programs more accessible to seniors by reducing red tape and providing clearer information.

3. Help Young Workers Thrive: While Western Queens has benefited from the influx of young professionals into the community in recent years, rising rents and crushing debt make it difficult for these individuals to remain here, raise their families and contribute to our local economy. One policy I will promote to help these community residents is a bill I have introduced that would provide a personal income tax deduction for student loan payments.
4. Encourage Job Creation in Western Queens: I will work to expand the Empire State Film Production Credit in order to support the growing film industry in my district. I will also continue my advocacy for small businesses, the backbone of our local economies, by calling for tax credits for businesses that hire new workers and calling for more transparency in state regulations.
5. Hold Government Accountable to the People: While state government took significant steps in the last few years to reduce the dysfunction and corruption that plagued it in past years, we can always do more. I will fight to further limit pension benefits that can be received by state officials who are convicted of crimes related to their work. I will also support lowering contribution limits for state candidates and limiting contributions by LLC's, LLP's and corporations.

**Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee
299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007
via fax to 212.227.0345 or via email to policy@citizensunion.org
Call us at 212-227-0342 with any questions.**