



2013 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR CITY COUNCIL

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 residents 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. 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 thank you very much for your response.

Candidate Name: _____ Ken Biberaj Age: ___33___

Campaign Address: ___54 W. 76th Street, 4R, New York, NY, 10023_____

Campaign Telephone Number: (646) _707-0817_____ Fax: () _____

Party Affiliation(s):_Democrat_ Campaign Manager Name:_ Mediha Kosovrasti__

Website & Email: _www.ken2013.com___ken2013uws@gmail.com_____

Education: American University, BA; Harvard Kennedy School, Master's in Public Policy; New York Law School, JD

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Vice President of the Russian Tea Room__

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Florida State Research Director for John Kerry's Presidential Campaign; Culinary Council of the Food Bank for New York; Mentor with New York Needs You__

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES

(Please note: Citizens Union can only grant its support to candidates we have interviewed. If you would like to be interviewed, please follow up with Citizens Union staff, as resources constrain us from interviewing every candidate.)

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES

Signature of Candidate: _____ Date: _____

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 eliminating party primaries and establishing a non-partisan election system in which all candidates and all voters participate in the first round and the top two candidates advance to the second round?

Oppose. Although this is an intriguing idea with good intentions a top-two primary could end up having the perverse effect of subverting the will of the majority of voters and reducing the competitiveness of primary elections. Currently, the top-two primary system is used primarily in Washington State, Louisiana, and California. In 2010, Gonzaga University professors John Beck and Kevin Henrickson published a study on the top-two legislative primary election system in Washington State and concluded that the system gives political parties an incentive to discourage “excess” candidates from entering primaries. The reason is that splitting votes in a top-two system amongst multiple candidates of the same party gives a significant boost to the party that runs fewer candidates. For example, imagine a heavily Democratic city like New York. If the Democratic party had 75% popular support but ran seven candidates for a particular office, it would lose to a Republican party that only had 25% popular support but ran just two candidates if voters split their votes evenly amongst candidates for their own party (each Democrat would receive 10.7% while each Republican received 12.5%). Under such a system, candidates that lack the support of the party establishments would encounter much greater opposition to their bids, for the incentive to eliminate upstarts is much greater. Moreover, many believe that the top-two primary system encourages “tactical voting” in which voters deliberately select candidates who they believe to be weaker opponents for their desired general election candidate.

That being said, I have been a vocal advocate for changing the existing law in New York that makes it so difficult for people to switch parties. Currently, I worked very hard last summer to convince ‘Blanks’ –people not affiliated with a party but registered – to become Democrats ahead of the October 12, 2012 deadline so they will be allowed to vote in this year’s primary:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/05/nyregion/2013-new-york-primary-voting-requires-any-party-changes-by-oct-12.html>

As a result of my efforts on this front, I have been able to confirm that 615 people in my district have made the switch and I am working hard to get them out to vote on September 10th: <http://www.cityandstateny.com/council-candidate-biberaj-helps-voters-switch-parties/>

2. What is your position on instituting Instant Runoff Voting for all citywide offices and for all special elections for city offices? (Int. No. 1066)

Support. Current UWS Councilwoman Gale Brewer co-sponsored the bill referenced above with Brad Lander of Brooklyn. An instant runoff system would spare the City the difficulties caused by holding runoffs shortly after primary elections, could save up to \$20 million every election cycle that the City spends on runoffs, and would be more democratic since voter turnout is usually low for runoffs. The current runoff system also makes it nearly impossible to get ballots to absentee and military voters in time. This would also address some of the concerns related to the type of voting machine that is used.

3. What is your position on creating a voluntary municipal poll worker program to supplement poll worker recruitment by district leaders? (Int. No. 721)

Support. I think this is a great idea and will address some of the administrative issues related to getting poll workers and also give City employees the chance to work on Election Day.

4. What is your position on requiring city agencies to report the number of applicants that they register to vote as required by current law (Int. No. 760)?

Support. This should absolutely be disclosed and monitored. We need to collectively work hard to ensure as many New Yorkers are registered as possible and that means that every agency needs to do its part.

5. What is your position on transmitting electronically voter registration information collected by city agencies to the Board of Elections in the City of New York?

Support. BOE should ensure that as many voters as possible are registered to vote. As I mentioned above, I have worked tirelessly as the 'outside' not from the 'political establishment' on the Upper West Side to register more people as Democrats so that their voice can be heard in the Primary this year. Allowing voter registration to be done electronically makes perfect sense and it is embarrassing that we do not yet have that as an option. Furthermore, we should also allow the petitioning process to be done online as well. Why shouldn't candidates be allowed to get support electronically to get on the ballot?

6. What is your position on requiring the Board of Elections to report performance metrics to the City Council that conform to the Mayor's Management Report? (Int. No. 778)

Support.

7. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?

Support.

8. What is your position on expanding the Voter Guide published by the Campaign Finance Board to cover all races occurring in New York City, such as state and federal contests, and providing the opportunity for voters to receive the guide electronically rather than in print form? (Int. No. 769)

Support. This will make it easier for voters to become more informed about their political choices.

Campaign Finance Reform

9. What is your position on eliminating matching funds for contributions bundled by lobbying organizations or lobbyists?

Support. The purpose of the matching funds program is to bolster the influence of the small contributor and the average citizen vis-à-vis large donors. Crediting matching funds for contributions bundled by lobbyists distorts the program's purpose by removing the matching funds program as a political equalizer and instead turning it into one more tool that wealthy special interests can use to solidify their disproportionate influence in the political arena.

10. What is your position on banning placement agents from bundling contributions for any elected official who influences the selection of pension investors?

Support.

11. What is your position on prohibiting participants in the city's campaign finance program from using public matching funds to purchase strategic campaign consulting services from firms that also provide lobbying services?

Support. If elected, I would seek to go even further. I believe we should propose a bill that would prohibit campaign consulting firms from providing lobbying services. Firms should be able to do one or the other; allowing firms to lobby the very same elected officials that they helped put into office is a serious conflict of interest for the elected official.

City Council Reform

12. What is your position on creating a bill drafting service independent of the Speaker's Office, similar to the New York State Legislature's bill drafting commission?

Support.

13. What is your position on the following proposals enabling Council committees to function more effectively and independently of the speaker:

All of these measures will strengthen individual Councilmembers' independence from the Speaker, which will make the Council a more democratic and effective institution.

a. Should committee chairs have the ability to hire at least one committee staffer?

Support.

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

Support.

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

Support.

d. Should the number of overall committees be reduced so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?

Support. Currently, there are 47 standing committees, select committees, subcommittees, and task forces. That's 47 for 51 Councilmembers! The current proliferation of committees makes it difficult for Councilmembers to dedicate the appropriate level of attention to their various committee assignments and to develop genuine expertise. Councilmember Dan Garodnick stated that the number of committees could be reduced to 18. Reducing the number of committees will make Council committees more effective bodies that study issues in greater depth and make more meaningful contributions to the legislative process.

14. What is your position on greater disclosure of councilmembers' outside income?

Support.

15. What is your position on limiting stipends or "lulus" to only members holding majority or minority leadership positions?

Support.

16. When the Quadrennial Compensation Commission is reconvened, what is your position on requiring that any future increase in councilmember compensation only apply prospectively to the following term?

Support. It removes any possible suspicion among members of the public that Councilmembers may have a conflict of interest.

17. What is your position on ensuring a more equitable and needs-based distribution of discretionary funding?

Support.

18. What is your position on increasing transparency of discretionary funding by requiring the list of capital and expense funds and their sponsors be provided to councilmembers and the public three days in advance of any vote, and expanding the online searchable database of expense funds to include all capital fund recipients and applicants?

Support.

Public Safety and Oversight of Police Misconduct

19. What is your position on reducing the frequency of stop, question and frisks by conducting stops more judiciously?

Support.

20. What is your position on establishing the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) as a permanent commission in the City Charter while empowering the CCPC to issue subpoenas?

Support. If there is no subpoena power, then there is not much in real oversight that can be achieved.

21. What is your position on enhancing the Civilian Complaint Review Board's (CCRB) authority to initiate an investigation into reported or known incidents of police misconduct without receipt of a formal complaint?

Open to this - but want to analyze further. From a public policy perspective, I think there absolutely needs to be greater oversight of police misconduct. It is very troubling that almost half a billion dollars is spent to settle lawsuits with the NYPD. We need to address these issues in an open and transparent way.

22. What is your position on granting the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) with the authority to prosecute officers found guilty of lying during CCRB investigations?

Support.

23. What is your position on reinstating the zero tolerance penalty for false official statements by public officers?

Support.

Budget Reform

24. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for:

a. the borough presidents?

Support.

b. Conflicts of Interest Board?

Support.

c. the public advocate?

Support.

d. community boards?

Support.

25. What is your position on making the budget process more transparent by clearly defining units of appropriation and limiting their size?

Support.

26. What is your position on release of revenue projections (other than property taxes) prior to Council hearings on the Executive budget?

Support. Our budgeting process needs to be made much more transparent and Council members need to be in a position to analyze these revenue projections.

Land Use and Community Board Reform

27. What is your position on designating urban planners for use by community boards and requiring borough presidents report to the Council the manner in which they advertise and make community board appointments? (Int. No. 913)

Support. This will bring much greater transparency to the community board process.

28. What is your position on establishing a formal standardized and transparent process for community board appointments including written applications, interviews of candidates, and filling vacancies within 30 days?

Support.

II. 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 2013 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. Support the Quality of Life on the Upper West Side by helping small businesses stay open and protecting affordable housing for seniors and young families.
2. Invest in Our Community's Future by strengthening infrastructure, improving energy efficiency and investing in technology
3. Stand for the Progressive Values of our Neighborhood to ensure that every New Yorker's civil and human rights are protected.
4. Bring renewed energy to City Hall by building new partnerships that utilize the best of the public and private sectors to solve the City's multifaceted challenges.
5. Run a positive, grassroots campaign that is focused on the people and issues facing our community, not on petty politics or the party establishment.

**Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee
via fax to 212.227.0345 or via email to candidates@citizensunion.org
Call us at 212-227-0342 with any questions.**