



**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: Helen Diane Foster: Age: 42

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 16

Campaign Address: 1000 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10452

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 992-2379 Fax: (718) 293-7717 _____

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat Campaign Manager Name: Rev. Wendell Foster

Website & Email: hdf7@aol.com

Education: Howard University and City University of New York School of Law

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): New York City Council, 2002-Present

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Assistant District Attorney in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, Assistant Vice President for Legal Affairs at St. Barnabas Hospital

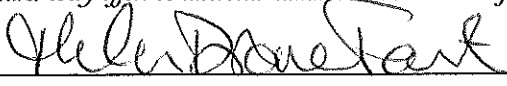
Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES x
NO

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: 7/20/09

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 supported the term limits extension because I have always maintained that term limits penalize elected officials communities of color by limiting the amount of seniority they can achieve. In addition, I have maintained that voters have the opportunity to enact term limits every four years when the City Council stands for re-election.

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?

In order to rein in pension costs the City needs to control government spending and eliminate fraud and waste which will in effect reduce the tax burden on New Yorkers as much as possible. In addition, we can also explore options like creating another tier for pensions to fall under – thus mandating more additional years of service in order to receive full benefits.

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

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

Among the areas that need improvement are: allowing New York City teachers and parents more influence public education matters, reforming the manner in which vacancies are filled, and allowing New York City to enact policies that bar discrimination.

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?

I support greater home rule being granted to New York City. I believe that greater sovereignty is needed in the area of land use and housing decisions, especially over rent control and rent stabilization.

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 people who the MTA serves need to be active partners in the agencies management and decision making, and any wholesale changes are going to have to come with increased public accountability and greater transparency I support streamlining the MTA management

structure, and allowing a strong, independent authority to review MTA budgets and spending proposals.

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

The Independent Budget Office (IBO) should be invited into the process of evaluating the use of budget funds. In addition, I support exhaustive audits be performed on all budget expenditures to ensure these funds are being used wisely.

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 that sound fiscal decisions need to be followed in the best and worst of economic times. I was always taught to its best to fix the roof while the sun is shining and I support using surplus revenue to pay down and control costs related to health care and retirement.

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 support lowering the tax burden so working families can keep more of their money and spend or save it as they see fit. I support eliminating unfair taxes like the Unincorporated Business Tax which is unfair to small business and freelancers. In addition, I support enhancing the Earned Income Tax Credit.

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?

_____ Our economy needs to extend across the five boroughs and tap into the best and brightest workforce the City has to offer. There are strides to be made in creating and maintaining a green economy which will produce thousands of jobs across numerous economic spectrums. In addition, we need to look into the area of bio-tech and agri-business as economic revenue streams we should look to cultivate.

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?

We need to have more well-defined roles for parents and principals so they can become more engaged in their child's education. In addition, we need to focus our educational efforts on a whole-child approach -- while reinstating character, arts, music and physical education. We should also place less emphasis on teaching students how to ace a standardized test and focus more on problem-solving skills, team-building and cooperation and independent thinking and research.

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?

I believe that we should take all the necessary steps to place all proceedings, rulings, requests made by any government entity available online in a searchable database for all constituents to see.

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 that all entities who receive taxpayer funding should have their documentation filed online so all can see. In addition, audits should be performed on all entities that receive taxpayer funding.