



**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: Steven Anthony Behar Age: 45

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 19

Campaign Address: 40-13 Bell Boulevard, Second Floor

Campaign Telephone Number: (646) 862-2527 Fax: () _____

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat Campaign Manager Name: Alex Leduc

Website & Email: www.SteveBehar.com ; Steve@BeharforNewYork.com

Education: LL.M.- Georgetown University, J.D.-Tulane, MBA-Tulane, B.A.-SUNY Albany

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Self Employed Attorney

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

Democrats for New Politics member, Tony Avella Campaign, Jim Genarro Campaign,

Councilman Avella's representative to Community Board 7 and Community Board 11,

formed the Bayside-based group Northeast Queens for Obama, member of the Jefferson

Democratic and has been a member of the Saul Weprin Democratic Club since 1986, serves

on the Board of Directors of the Queens County Progressive Democratic Club.

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

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? **YES**

(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:



Steven Anthony Behar

Date: 7/29/2009

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

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| 1. What is your position with respect to allowing voters who are registered as independents to vote in party primaries? | Support | <u>Oppose</u> |
| 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? | <u>Support</u> | 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? | <u>Support</u> | 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? | <u>Support</u> | 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? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

- | | | |
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| 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? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
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| 7. What is your position on allowing campaign financing for ballot proposals? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
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CITY COUNCIL REFORM

- | | | |
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| 8. What is your position on allowing Council committees to function more independently of the speaker than is presently the case? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| a. Should committee staff be hired by and report to committee chairs? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| b. Should committee hearings and votes be scheduled at the direction of the chairs? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| c. Should committees be able to issue subpoenas by a vote of their members? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| 9. What is your position on: | | |
| a. limiting councilmembers' ability to earn outside income? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| b. making the job of councilmember a full-time position? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| c. eliminating or limiting stipends for committee chairs and leadership positions? | <u>Support</u> | 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? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| 11. What is your position on consolidating the current City Council committee structure and reducing the number of overall committees? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| 12. What is your position on term limits for elected officials? | <u>Support</u> | 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? | <u>Support</u> | 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 am opposed to the recent extension of term limits to three consecutive four year terms.

The voters of New York City have twice voted in favor of term limits while the Mayor and City Council ignored the will of the people.

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?

Within the constraints of the city budget, we need to work to make sure that city employees receive a retirement wage they can live on however, certain retiree systems need to be adjusted to account for the growing budget strain from those systems and the for the actuarial fact that people are living longer.

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?

The three most important issues in need of improvement through a State Constitutional Convention include election finance reform, the creation of checks and balances between the state legislative and executive branch and the city regaining control over its own housing laws.

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 do believe that greater home rule should be granted to the City of New York. The issues of housing, education and mass transit should be given more sovereignty.

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?

New York City is the only major city in the United States that does not control its own mass transit system. The MTA needs to be better monitored and audited. Efficiencies need to be found and waste eliminated from the authority. In a perfect world, the MTA would be dissolved and New York City would gain control over its transit system and finally the MTA budget would take into account the positive externalities of an efficient mass transit system including but not limited to; better air quality, higher quality of health including lower cases of asthma, increases in business and increases in the take base.

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

The city council should have more input with the executive branch on the budget and the city council needs more powers to investigate and hold hearings during the budget process.

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 the City of New York has been extremely fiscally irresponsible in the past. As a city councilperson, I would require New York City to create a "rainy day" fund so that money is saved in years with budget surpluses to avoid cutting services (such as education, fire and police departments) when city revenues fall.

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.

The average New Yorker pays too much in taxes and does not receive the appropriate amount of services. I think due to the current budget crisis that taxes should be increased for the wealthiest New Yorkers considering they are the ones gaining the most benefits from living and working in New York City. The commuter tax should be reinstated and a temporary and targeted "millionaires tax" should be instituted to guide New York City through the current fiscal crisis.

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?

Over the last decade New York City has focused too much of this economic development in the financial services and real estate industry. Those are the two industries that have been hit hardest in the economic down turn. Although the economy has seen better days, the City of New York continues to make it very difficult for small business to flourish. An example of a business disincentive in New York State is the requirement that each new limited liability company (LLC) registered with New York State publish that it has been formed in two newspapers for six weeks each. While the filing fee to register a new LLC is only \$200, the required publication can add \$1500 to the cost of starting a new business. Meanwhile, nearly all

of the information required to be published in the newspapers is already published on the web site of the New York State Secretary of State. In the age of the Internet, publishing this information in two newspapers serves absolutely no purpose other than to line the pockets of newspaper publishers. This section of the New York State LLC Act is simply corporate welfare for the newspaper industry. This is just one of many examples of how the State and City take advantage of small business owners — and it's not right! Here in District 19, this unwelcoming small business environment is visible in all of our shopping districts. Too many vacant storefronts can be seen in Bayside, College Point, Flushing, Whitestone, Little Neck, and Douglaston. In addition to improving the business environment, we need to work together to determine how our business owners, landlords, and residents can collectively improve the business climate. Once elected, I will convene a series "Small Business Town Hall" meetings throughout the district. These meetings will bring together small business owners, landlords, community leaders, and government officials. It is time to get all the stakeholders together in one room so that they can work together to make everyone more successful. The Small Business Town Halls will help highlight the problems facing our small businesses and help determine a path to once again have a thriving small business community in northeast Queens. If New York City is successful in promoting and growing small businesses across a broad range of industries then there would be no shift to lower paying jobs and there would be a possibility of growing the tax base.

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?

The law providing for mayoral control of the city school system should be modified to provide more input from teachers, administrators and parents. In addition the decision making process should be decentralized to allow more input in the decision making process at the school district and school level. Teachers should be paid salaries that are competitive with the counties outside of New York City so the city will not lose its teachers to higher paying jobs in the suburbs. The New York City schools have become "prep schools" for teachers in the suburb school districts. More capital spending should be invested in building new schools to eliminate the overcrowding prevalence in New York City schools.

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?

As part of a broader plan of checks and balances between the executive and legislative branch, the city council should have more oversight over the board elections. In addition a new system of full public financing of elections and easier ballot access should be instituted so that the entire process is more transparent.

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?

As a former Securities and Exchange Commission attorney, I strongly believe in full and fair disclosure. Since sunlight is the best disinfectant, council members should disclose all funds given to any organizations and disclose his or her relationships with the party that runs such an organization. In addition, an independent body should review any and all relationships.



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. Propose legislation providing for full public financing of elections and providing for easier ballot access to allow more qualified candidates to seek elected office.
2. To fight special interests, such as real estate developers from exerting too much influence on our political process.
3. To pass legislation that assists small business to start and grow in New York City.
4. To fully support our New York public school system.
5. To work to make New York City a greener and more environmentally friendly place.