



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: Melquiades Gagarin Age: 27

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 29

Campaign Address: 119-30 Metropolitan Ave. 2nd Fl Kew Gardens, NY 11415

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 578-1001 Fax: (347) 561-3877 *cell first

Party Affiliation(s): D Campaign Manager Name: Aleda Gagarin

Website & Email: www.GAGARIN2009.com, gagarin2009@gmail.com

Education: B.A. Political Science, American University

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Media Manager NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

Communications Dir. NYS Sen. Jose M. Serrano, Special Assistant U.S. Congressman Anthony Weiner, Kew Gardens Improvement Assoc.

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

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES [checked] 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: [Signature] Date: 07/14/09

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

→ unclear as to whether
 • we mean "public financing"

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 believe that the process by which term-limits were extended caused great harm in the faith we have in our local democratic processes. The maneuvering that went on, largely behind closed doors, took the people's voice away. The term-limits question could have been placed on the ballot and decided by the voters of New York as they had twice before.

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?

Our current pension structure is teetering on the edge of defaulting on the future retirement funding for thousands of civil service employees in our city. We must come to a compromise of measures that reduce the wasteful spending of some overly generous pension supplements while making sure their post employment years are not a struggle for meeting the basic living expenses. When we are facing a budget deficit that has been padded by surplus rollovers we must explore changes to our current contract agreements that preserve existing jobs and insures the longevity of our pension structure.

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?

Electoral Reform, Increasing transparency of city and state agencies, and re-examining how redistricting is carried out

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 believe the City should be granted greater home rule, particularly in the areas of taxation and transportation.

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?

There needs to be a restructuring of the MTA to increase transparency and establishing clear lines of accountability. I would also support a regional tax to ensure that all that benefit from the MTA's services are also paying their fair share.

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

I believe in a continued push for more public input and transparency. Measures like the Budget Transparency Initiative that calls for both a program and perform based budget makes more visible, the outcome of taxpayers funding. It also holds individual departments responsible for their spending. By holding public projects accountable will can cut wasteful spending and use that money to extend the benefits to more people.

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?

We have a responsibility to do all we can to not return to the distressed NYC of the 1970s by continuing to keep our streets safe, our public transportation running and our city agencies servicing the public. A marginal increase in our cities sales tax coupled with pushing reform in mayoral agencies will reduce waste and provides accountability. These steps will lead to more educated and responsible distribution of city expenditures. The resulted funds can help stem future tax increases and shed light on how to work toward long-term solutions for our city's problems instead of perpetuating a continuing cycle of abuse.

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.

Many in my district feel that they are not seeing the quality of City services that they should be receiving given the taxes they pay. While in the short term I agree that we needed a minimal increase in the sales tax, I also believe that we need to increase taxes on unhealthy foods, and cigarettes, which also will help save on healthcare costs as we improve the citizenry's health. I also believe that the Council has a responsibility to examine the budget more closely and insure that the mayor is taking out redundant and wasteful spending items. I am also in favor of a progressive tax in New York City to help stem the outward flow of New York's middle class.

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?

We have to do everything to support the creation of new jobs through a multi pronged attack featuring nonprofit incubators, BIDs, local colleges and the offices of local council members. Working together they can encourage entrepreneurship and the investment requirement to grow green industries. Queens has vast space for light manufacturing and a population of 2.8 million within that a workforce ready to take up the challenge. Through a mixed control of responsible land zone controls and job training initiatives we can lead the next generation by bringing small business back to our city.

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 current breakup of our school system into smaller entities with diverse focuses provides more opportunities that ever before to include parental involvement in how we structure our curriculums. With 8 members of the board under mayoral appointment there is an overwhelming one-sided control of the discussion in public education. Some members of the Panel for Educational Policy should be selected from recommendations by community boards and reputable education experts. We need ideas from both ends of the spectrum to develop best practices in our classrooms. All appointees should be restricted to term limits to ensure a regular infusion of new ideas. By being the largest municipal education system in the country we must provide an example of how parents and educators can work together to bring quality education to our children.

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?

We support the proposal for taking partisan politics out of the Board of Elections. The reforms suggested by The Citizens Union for a 11 member board with the inclusion of a third party or independent voice allows for a more valid representation of our registered voters and will hopefully follow with the involvement of new leaders to our election process.

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 any non-profit organization requesting discretionary funding needs to submit an application to their respective member. The application must state the amount being requested and what specifically the money is going to. All applications should be posted on-line on the member's council page. If an application is submitted by a non-profit where a family member works, or is in a position of authority, that must be disclosed by the member on the website along with a justification as to why the non-profit is receiving the funding.

Once the funding is handed out, the councilmember must post which of the applications were granted funding along with a statement justifying the award. Finally on a 6 month basis the non-profits must report if the money they were awarded was used for the project they requested it for, and if not why that money was used on something else.

Finally any non-profit run or employing a councilmember's family member should be barred from receiving discretionary funding in consecutive years, unless the councilmember's relative has left the organization and has no financial or political stake in the group.

Additional Comments:

As a first time candidate I have understood that the handful of endorsements I have sought, were more than likely going to one of the other candidate's in my race, because the way our system currently works most groups base their support on shaky metrics of viability, as opposed to ideological similarities, or actual viability. While I have accepted this fact, I see The Citizens Union as a fair minded and mission oriented group. While I may not have raised the most money, or received a heavy list of endorsements, this was something I anticipated early on and have adjusted my campaign accordingly.

I consider myself a reform candidate, and have run an unconventional campaign based almost exclusively on direct voter contact, which given the amount of time I've spent going from door to door and the number of voters I've personally spoken to, I believe I have a strong chance of winning, pending I do not fall victim to the petitioning "game". I personally understand the need for electoral reform in our City, and having made a number of friends running in other races, see how election after election well intentioned reform minded individuals fall victim to the flaws of our system. I believe in the Citizens Union's mission and hope that I can not only earn your endorsement but help carry the organization's mission once I am elected.



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. Reforming how as-of-right development works so that a community has a role in determining how their neighborhood grows.
2. Working to ensure the City is meeting its obligations to reduce class size
3. Protecting senior centers in the district and establishing new programs to aid seniors with information technology
4. Fighting for a progressive tax
5. Improving transparency in my office's operations