

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: Medhanie Estiphanos Age: 33

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 35

Campaign Address: 722 Classon Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11238

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 399-3953 Fax: (718) 718-228-8466

Party Affiliation(s): Democratic

Campaign Manager Name: Gery Waterman

Website & Email: www.Change35.com; Medhanie2009@gmail.com

Education: BA, SFSU; MBA, NYU

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

Consultant, Deloitte Financial Advisory

Policy Maker and Administrator, Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles

Special Education Teacher, Tobinworld School

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

Fregenet Foundation

President of Stern in Africa

Activist for Darfur and African Economic Development

Mentor

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

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

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

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?

First, we must keep our promise to those who worked hard to build our city. Second, we must reform the system to apply more of the city worker's income towards their retirement. However, I am not a believer in privatizing the retirement system (i.e. 401K). Third, we need to set a better and more realistic expectation for pensions in the minds of city workers. We must acknowledge that the old system is not suitable going forward; therefore, we must encourage home ownership, saving, and prudent spending. Finally, we must reduce the overall cost of living for all New Yorkers. We cannot continue to abandon poor and working families. In this respect, I am a strong advocate for a free mass transit system, set asides for all new housing developments regardless of location, and reform education to make it fair for everyone.

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

Support

Oppose

- a. If support, what are the three most important areas that need improvement?
 - a. Allow minority party to introduce bill for an up and down vote on the floor of the senate.
 - b. Allow municipality to have a greater say in gun control law.
 - c. Allow municipality to determine urban planning with little state input.

- 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 –

- a. Allow municipality to have a greater say in gun control law.
- b. Allow municipality to determine urban planning with little state input.
- c. Allow municipality to determine public transportation priorities and funding.

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?

First, I am a strong advocate for free mass transit. I believe that free mass transit is the only solution to our transportation and congestion problems. With that said, I am also a strong advocate for congestion pricing. Moreover, we need to use the funds generated through congestion pricing to fund the MTA and reduce fares. Congestion pricing is inevitable. Many cities have implemented it and many more are considering. New York City will follow suit.

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

There must a committee that negotiates the budget with the Mayor's office aside from simply the Speaker. The budget process must be inclusive and represent every bureau and community in that negotiation.

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 support it, and I will fight to ensure that it remains as policy.

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 believe in fair taxation and fair service in return. The majority of New Yorker are taxed not only through their payroll, sales tax, property tax, and fees, but are also taxed in the form of deteriorating infrastructure, poor education, poor policing, expensive public transportation, and poor urban planning. I don't believe we need to increase taxes to improve the city. We are paying a substantial amount. It is about fair distribution of existing

resources. With that said, I also do believe in a progressive tax scheme that does not continue to put a burden on the poor and middle income family.

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?

I believe we need to focus on a green economy. Our City has massive and deteriorating infrastructure which can easily be retrofitted to be more energy efficient. We should also commit to using green technology for our government buildings, transportation, and require all new buildings to use or supplant with alternative energy sources. I am a firm believer in the Mayor's Green NYC initiative as well as his proposed investment in startups. We need to focus on green business investment and properly fund the Green NYC initiative. With that said, I also do believe we need to ensure that we don't lose Wall Street jobs and that New York City continues to be the financial center of the world.

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 positive changes can be made to the New York City public school system?

I believe choice is missing for parents in our current school system. If we provide more choice for parents (i.e. Charter Schools and school vouchers), they will take responsibility for making school decisions on behalf of their children. Currently, we have a system that encourages parents – especially single mother families and working parents – to drop their children off at the nearest school for six hours and don't ask any questions. By providing choice and options, parents will be empowered to ask tough questions and demand more from their 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?

We should remove political parties from the operation and administration of the Board of Election.

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?

The majority of non-profit's funding cannot be sourced from the City Council. No member of the City Council should be allowed to fund any organization that has in its leadership a member of his/her family or others with a close personnel relationship.



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. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____