



**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: _____ Vincent Gentile _____ Age: 51_____

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 43_____

Campaign Address: 7321 15th Avenue, Brooklyn NY 11228_____

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 236-1120_____ Fax: (718) 236-1120_____

Party Affiliation(s): Dem. _____ Campaign Manager Name: Ian Newman_____

Website & Email: www.GentileforNewYork.com_____

Education: BA Cornell University; JD Fordham University_____

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): New York City Council Member (March 2003- present)_____

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: President of Bay Ridge Community Council (1989-1990) New York State Senator (1997- 2002). Queens County assistant District Attorney (1985-1996)

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU’s Local Candidates Committee? YES X NO _____
Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES X 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: Vincent J. Gentile

Date: 11/5/09

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 | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 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? | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 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? | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 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? | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 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 | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 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? | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 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 voted against the bill to extend term limits to 12 years. I opposed the extension of term limits on the basis that term limits had been modified and reaffirmed in two voter referendums.

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?

New York City should look for innovative ways to share costs with workers. This may mean a reinvestment of pension payments and staggered or deferred payment plans.

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?

The State must undertake a serious review of its governmental operations. The three priorities that such a commission must review are, 1) State Legislature overhaul 2) MTA Financing and operations. 3) Education funding and operations.

- 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?

There should be some leeway in State control of New York City Operations. While it is important that the State legislature buffer the power of a strong mayoralty New York City should be able to make decision without seeking approval from the State. For example all land use items that require home rule messages should be limited to items of a particular size and scope. Minor items of a certain square footage should be able to move through city approvals without seeking approval from Albany. In addition, Issues of rent regulations should be within the sole responsibility of the city.

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 opposed congestion pricing as residents in my community found it unfair that they should have to pay a fee to travel within their own city. Additionally, I am concerned that monies raised through the congestion pricing plan would never result in the strengthening and

enhancing of transportation options but rather would be used to plug holes in existing budgets. I believe that an internal audit of all MTA financing must be done. As with any corporate model, a study should be done of how money is being spent and where additional savings can be found. An audit of this nature should be conducted by an out of state consultant with no relationships or political conflict of interests. Once an independent audit is concluded we can attempt to cut programs that don't work. Create savings where no exist today and then implement new techniques for funding the MTA. It is unsustainable however to simply increase bridge and tunnel tolls every year. Real leadership would mandate that we advocate for a return of the commuter tax.

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 currently only adds approximately 0.83% of the total City Spending. While they review agency budgets they rarely make changes to budgets as outlined in the Mayor's Executive Budget. Largely this percentage is debated by and agreed upon by the Budget negotiating team with input from the larger Council through the Caucus system.

First, programmatic spending should reported on in yearly reports that define the goal of the program and the effectiveness supported by data. These reports should be delivered to the City Council for review and comment before the City Council begins its preliminary budget hearings. The council should then have the ability to cut any program funding that it deems as ineffective.

Further the City Council like the Borough Presidents should have its own charter mandated funding. The current funding should not be an agreed upon number negotiated by the Mayor and the Council but rather be formally defined as some percentage based upon the City's revenue and spending formulas. Any additional money beyond these figures could be determined through negotiation with the Administration and City Council.

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?

Putting Surplus tax revenue in past years in a lock box at the expense of lowering current tax rates was unacceptable and thus I supported the decision not to use current revenue for that purpose this year.

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.

Taxes are not delivered equitably throughout the city. However they are not designed to do so. Communities that need greater support should receiver greater equity. Over burdening residents, businesses and visitor's to New York City with additional fees and taxes is not an effective way to operate a city.

Clearly the first priority must be to lower property tax rates in New York. New Yorkers are constantly threatened with higher property taxes to pay for the same level of services. However, lower property taxes partnered with other programs that encourage greater home ownership throughout New York City would not only strengthen communities and lead to an upward movement through the socioeconomic scale but also increase property tax revenues.

I am not as concerned with programmatic spending as it accounts for a small percentage of our budget as I am with healthcare spending. Currently New York City is required to foot a portion of the state Medicaid system. This equates to roughly \$.04 on every dollar or approximately \$2.4 billion in FY 2010. New York City must find a way to reform healthcare spending that reduces its budget exposure. Advances in medicine don't only mean that individuals are living longer but that the cost of new, advanced technology will only go to increase the city's potential for exposure. It is vital that New York City identify opportunities to reduce city healthcare spending without effecting quality of care.

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?

Since 2002 New York has made great strides in diversifying the economy of the City. Because of the incredible revenues generated on Wall Street when it is running smoothly New York will never be able to create any singular activity that can rival on a percentage to total impact basis what can be created on Wall Street. However it is vital that for New York City to survive other economic crisis's as well as be positioned to thrive into the 21st century. First the city should continue to and strengthen its Biotech and healthcare industry. Biotechnology and innovation attract well-educated individuals with high paying jobs. More locations for laboratory and incubator sites should be identified in outer-borough locations with easy access to Manhattan via mass transit and vehicular traffic. During the current economic crisis, the healthcare industry stood as the only sector that continued to produce revenue while financial, real estate, tourism and retail sectors faltered.

I would also like the city to invest in understanding the future of "green jobs". It is unclear whether "green jobs" exist on a large enough scale to assist in buffering an economy the size of New York's. However, the City of New York should research what opportunities exist for creating large scale green job opportunities within the New York City economy. If it is determined that "green jobs" in a large scale operation is a viable business the New York should seek to attract this emerging business sector.

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?

I believe that the decentralization of the Department of Education is vital to increasing parent and teach involvement in the education system. The Department of Education should move back to District Super Intendants and district parental boards that offer localized and detailed information to dedicated individuals who can work to address micro issues within their district. This allows quick resolution and stronger understanding of individual schools' needs and resources. Additionally increasing the size of the Panel for Educational Policy and giving those who serve on the panel great autonomy to suggest and criticize departmental policies would add additional pressure on the bureaucracy to be responsive to parental concerns.

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?

The Board of Elections needs a major overhaul. First I would remove remake the Board by removing partisan Commissioners. We should instead put in place a group of election's professionals that can make decisions based upon best practices and successful election operations.

Next I would attempt to update the terribly obsolete system which we currently use to petition for a place on the ballot. The State should study balloting procedures of other states and major City's to produce a public referendum question on the best way to be placed on a ballot.

I am also concerned with the quality of our poll workers. Every election we find inconsistency in the response to questions and rights of voters from Election Districts even within the same polling location. I believe that a clearly defined and posted Voter Bill of Rights should be present at the entrance of each polling location and at each voting booth. And that each poll worker should be required to receive instruction and Site Coordinator's pass a basic test in order to work at polls on Election Day.

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?

There is a clear conflict of interest that exists when an organization is receiving funding when a senior employee is related to an elected official. The employee of such organization must be required to inform both the City Clerk and the Conflict of Interest Board of the existing relationship. The employee must also inform the City Council or Mayor's office when requesting funding.

Furthermore, the Elected Official should similarly be required to alert the City Clerk, Conflict of Interest Board and City Council Finance division when such relationships exist.



CANDIDATE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Citizens Union is adding a new element to its evaluation of incumbents running for re-election. In addition to evaluating their stances on the issues above, Citizens Union will assess incumbents on how well they kept the promises they made to voters during the previous election.

As an elected official who is seeking re-election,

- a. what were the top five promises you made to your constituents when you ran for your current position and what progress have you made to keep those promises, and why and why not have you met them?
- b. what are your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position?

We thank you very much for your response. Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

TOP FIVE CAMPAIGN PROMISES FROM 2005 AND ACTION ON THEM

1. Rid residents of unfair and nuisance ticketing by government agencies. My office has led the fight against targeted parking ticket blitzes and targeted sanitation ticketing blitzes. Having largely had these tactics stopped.
2. Rezone bay Ridge and Dyker Heights. We have rezoned hundreds of blocks in this community
3. Bring back 6-day library service. As Libraries Sub-Committee Chairman I have brought back and saved 6 day library service and even secured 7 day service at some locations.
4. Address parking issues in the district. My office has located and added dozens of new street parking locations as well as supported new structured parking facilities within the commercial zones of the community. I've also introduced legislation to reduce parking issues.
5. Upgrade parks and open spaces. I have secured millions of dollars for funding to upgrade a series of local parks within my district.

TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. Continue to fight for lower property taxes.
2. Address Public School overcrowding and continue funding renovations
3. Protect against firehouse closings and against decreasing headcounts in police departments that are regularly targeted in my district.
4. Pass legislation to increase the enforcement power over illegal conversion of homes.
5. Strengthen and grow the Bay Ridge green market as a viable location to purchase fresh produce for residents without markets conveniently located to their homes.