



**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: **JAMES M. POCCHIA** Age: **43**

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: **50**

Campaign Address: **114 SEGUINE AVENUE, STATEN ISLAND, NY 10309**

Campaign Telephone Number: **(718) 668-2275** Fax: **(718) 605-5156**

Party Affiliation(s): **DEMOCRATIC**

Campaign Manager Name: **DAVID DEMARTINO**

Website & Email: WWW.POCCHIAFORCITYCOUNCIL.COM

POCCHIAFORCOUNCIL@VERIZON.NET

Education: **ST. PATRICK'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL (STATEN ISLAND, NY)**

MONSIGNOR FARRELL HIGH SCHOOL (STATEN ISLAND, NY)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, BS, CUM LAUDE

BROOKLYN LAW SCHOOL

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): **SELF EMPLOYED
ATTORNEY AT LAW, LAW OFFICES OF JAMES M. POCCHIA**

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

YOUTH BASEBALL AND BASKETBALL COACH

MEMBER, RICHMONDTOWN/CLARKE AVENUE CIVIC ASSOCIATION

**VICE CHAIRPERSON AND LEGAL COUNSEL, JOINT MID ISLAND CIVIC
ASSOCIATION**

MEMBER, ST. PATRICK'S PARISH COUNCIL

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: 9/28/09

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

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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? | Support | <u>Oppose</u> |

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? | Support | <u>Oppose</u> |
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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? | Support | <u>Oppose</u> |
| 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 strongly opposed to Mayor Bloomberg's by-passing the will of the people of the City of New York by seeking an extension of term limits for himself and all city council members by introducing legislation directly to the city council.

On two prior occasions, the people of the City of New York have spoken on this issue and unequivocally voted to keep term limits. Therefore, it is inconceivable that Mayor Bloomberg would take steps to render the votes of the people of the City of New York meaningless.

The purported reasoning supporting Mayor Bloomberg's effort is flawed. No one individual is more important than the democratic process - no matter what the circumstances. While we are in the middle of a terrible financial crisis, I believe there are qualified candidates for city council, borough president and mayor who will rise to the occasion this year and be part of the solution in leading this great city back to economic success. Indeed, the financial crisis that the Mayor utilized as his reasoning for extending term limits appears to be heading towards an end with a recovery in sight. Moreover, if this City could recover from 9-11 with a change in leadership, then surely we can recover from this recession with a change in leadership. And let us not forget that it was this very mayor who refused to allow then Mayor Rudy Giuliani to extend his own tenure for a third term. There can be no greater example of a hypocrite.

Let us also remember that the issue is not whether you believe that two terms or three terms is the appropriate tenure for a mayor or city council member. That is a question worthy of debate and deliberation. The issue at hand is that this attempt by Mayor Bloomberg to circumvent the decision of the people of the City of New York rocks the very foundation of a democracy. How can we expect to convince our children and adolescents and young adults to become involved in the democratic process when they see an elected official attempt to nullify two prior decisions of the voting public.

In short, I strongly disagree with each and every member of the City Council who voted in favor of extending term limits. I also take issue with any City Council member who seeks a third term under these circumstances, whether they voted for the term limits extension or against it. In fact, any council member, including my opponent, who voted against extending term limits and then ran for a third term, has demonstrated a lack of principle on the matter.

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.

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|---|-----------------------|--------|
| 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? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| 16. What is your position on changing the current land use process under ULURP to increase the role of community-based planning? | <u>Support</u> | 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? | <u>Support</u> | Oppose |
| 18. What is your position on reforming the current pension funding structure to create multiple tiers for future city government employees? | Support | Oppose |

To be discussed

- 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?

Clearly, the current system is not sustainable over the long haul. There is no doubt that reform is necessary. We need to find ways to deal with this problem without cutting pension benefits. As the son of a retired New York City Corrections Captain, I see first hand how important my father's pension benefits are to him. This is a difficult problem that requires much discussion and participation by all interested parties. There is no one simple solution and certainly not one which can be set forth herein.

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

To be discussed

- a. If support, what are the three most important areas that need improvement? _____
- 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 do support a greater home rule for New York City. I believe that greater home rule should be implemented in all areas that directly affect the quality of the day to day lives of New York City residents. We live in the greatest city and most complex city. As a result, we should be able to directly influence our day to day lives through the actions of our own elected officials.

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?

I believe that the MTA is one of the most poorly run organizations in New York City. I have not seen the improvements promised or planned. There needs to be a greater emphasis on efficiency. Here in Staten Island we have always been under served by the MTA. One improvement to be explored would be the creation of a Commissioner of the MTA to report directly to the Mayor with the Mayor bearing ultimate accountability for success of the MTA.

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

To me, the budget process is tainted. Currently, the Speaker of the City Council and the Mayor hold the overwhelming majority of the power in setting the budget. This needs to change. We need more input from each councilmember. There should be direct involvement by the councilmembers and debate. If debate becomes a required part of the process, there is a greater likelihood that constituent’s thoughts, ideas and needs will be counted.

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 it is always a good idea to anticipate future financial obligations. I have been in favor of this practice in the past and do understand that today’s economic

climate influenced the decision this year. I am optimistic that we will be able to return to this practice next year as we see our economy rebound.

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.

We Staten Islanders pay a disproportionate share of New York City's taxes and something needs to be done about that. I believe that for Staten Islanders property taxes need to be lowered. We Staten Islanders have the greatest number of one and two family homes in the city. We need property tax relief. I also believe that the Unincorporated Business Tax/Partnership tax needs to be eliminated.

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 support the idea of creating a more diversified economy. This must be done within the context of what New York City has to offer. Here in Staten Island we have a tremendously under developed shoreline. We also have an under utilized corporate park. I would like to see attention paid to these two areas. We must also identify waste and operate more efficiently. For example, there should be a review of the City's policy on vehicles for city employees and the expenses associated with that. We live in a city of trains and buses. Surely, there is room to cut in this particular policy.

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?

The problem is that each time the State legislature implements new provisions for increasing the role of parents, the City Department of Education ignores the changes. We need to enforce adherence to the changes. Parents have the right to participate. With regard to specific positive changes, I would like to see a course given on Life Skills to our high school students. At the minimum, it can be added as part of another course. In addition, here on Staten Island, where we have so many vehicles on the roads, I would like to see a Drivers Tolerance Program added to the high school curriculum.

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 transparency already exists. However, I also believe that the Board of Elections is not functioning correctly. The idea of placing an equal amount of

members of both the Democratic and Republican parties is flawed. We need a truly independent board of elections.

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 would support greater disclosure requirements for council members and their families. I would also support a prohibition on funding to groups which maintain relationships with council members or their families. There needs to be more oversight and investigation where appropriate.

Additional Comments:

The problems that Staten Islanders face are unique to Staten Island. I believe that my real life experiences as a husband, father, homeowner, and small business owner give me a unique perspective to serve Staten Islanders. I face the same problems that all Staten Islanders face: unbearable traffic, deteriorating roads, and lack of adequate health care.

In addition, I have demonstrated leadership skills as a community activist and active member of civic associations. It's time for me to take the next step.

For far too long, Staten Island has been the forgotten borough. I reject that notion. I will work to get the message through to City Hall that Staten Island needs to be remembered. We must be given our fair share of services including funding from HHC for a public hospital, additional roadway crews for repairs of our infrastructure and relief from our over taxation, whether it be through property taxes or out of control bridge tolls.

It's time for real solutions and effective change.

James M. Pocchia



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. **Adhere to term limits.**
2. **Fight for increased funding and services from HHC until we receive our proportionate share.**
3. **Develop solutions for increased rapid transit.**
4. **Fight to stop the Department of Transportation from building a traffic “Roundabout” in Richmondtown and, instead, help move forward on a community supported alternative.**
5. **Increase our efforts to develop the Midland Beach and South Beach shoreline.**
6. **Identify a suitable location for an east shore dog park and move forward with development.**
7. **Develop a plan for having hot meals delivered to families caring for a child with autism to allow parents more time for the necessary care.**
8. **Fight for permanent increase in the number of roadway repair crews for Staten Island.**
9. **Fight for increased parental input and participation in their children’s public school education.**
10. **Put an end to no bid contracts involving the Department of Education.**