



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: Jessica S. Lappin Age: 34

Office to Which You Seek (Re) Election: Council District #: 5

Campaign Address: 333 East 55th Street, Apt. 5G3, New York, NY 10022

Campaign Telephone Number: (917) 324-7367 Fax: () _____

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat Campaign Manager Name: Lauren Wagner

Website & Email: www.jessicalappin.com; jessicalappin@aol.com

Education: Georgetown University, BA, Phi Beta Kappa and Magna Cum Laude; Stuyvesant High School, Regents Diploma

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): 3 1/2 years in office

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Current member of the Sutton Place Synagogue Membership Committee, Former Director of Sutton Area

Community Group, and former Secretary of the Lenox Hill Democratic Club.

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: Jessica S. Lappin Date: 7/17/09

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 | 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 |

This is a matter that is within the jurisdiction of the state legislature. At this time, I have not seen an alternative plan or proposal to restructure the Board. However, I would be interested in reviewing a plan that found a way to remove partisanship and politics from election administration.

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?

I believe that this proposal would give far too much power to the Mayor, who is an elected official and subject to the decisions of the Board. It also has the potential to remove any bi-partisan check on the system.

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

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

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| 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 | <u>Oppose</u> |
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While I philosophically oppose term limits, I didn't support the process Mayor Bloomberg used for extending them. That is why I voted against the Mayor's bill.

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 |

The answer to this question would depend on the context of the overall economy and budget deficit. While I would consider it as an option, it would have to be part of a larger discussion, negotiation, and debate over cutting labor costs.

- 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?

The Comptroller, who manages the investment of our pension system, should pursue a more conservative investment strategy that is focused on both income and growth. In the future, we will also need to have a discussion in our city about what is fair for union members yet still affordable for our city.

- 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?

1) Campaign finance reform should be enacted; 2) an independent redistricting commission should be created for drawing legislative districts; and 3) a clear process for replacing a Lieutenant Governor should be established.

- 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, New York City should be given greater home rule, particularly when it comes to taxation and budget issues, housing, and education.

- 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 supported the Ravitch Commission "mobility tax" on payrolls in the region and also voted in favor of congestion pricing in the City Council. Congestion pricing would provide a reliable revenue stream for mass transit, reduce air pollution and congestion, and help spur economic development. I sincerely hope that we will revisit the concept in the future.

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

I support greater use of programmatic budgets. That would enable members to better understand how funds impact service delivery. It would also help end the traditional budget dance between the Mayor and the Council. I also support changes to the process for approving the Education Capital budget. Now, the Council can only vote yes or no and it's unclear what a no vote would actually mean. The Council should be able to approve, modify, or clearly reject the plan.

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 supported the city's practice of setting aside approximately \$8 billion in better financial times to help deal with our pension and health care liabilities. If we had not done that, the Council and Mayor would have been forced to make much more severe and punitive budget cuts for FY 2010. The budget deficit in FY 2010, and the outlook for FY 2011, precluded a similar surplus roll 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.

The tax burden for New York City residents is high. But, our city does provide a real social safety net for those most in need. Unfortunately, due to the current fiscal crisis, both the city and state had to raise taxes this year to protect and maintain certain core services. Even with those increases, the Council and the Mayor still cut nearly \$2 billion from the budget. While I did not like voting for tax increases, I did believe it was necessary to balance our budget while protecting core city services.

I would have preferred reforming our Personal Income Tax system and voting on more progressive tax increases. One bright spot in this year's budget was a reduction in the Unincorporated Business Tax for many small businesses.

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 wholeheartedly support diversifying our economy and making it less reliant on Wall Street. Our current fiscal crisis certainly reinforces that need. To that end, I am the prime sponsor in the City Council of a biotech tax credit. My bill will provide a \$3 million credit to small biotech firms that bring their jobs, innovation, and new technology to our city. Eligible firms with less than 110 employees could receive credits worth up to \$250,000 a year, renewable for up to four years.

The accompanying legislation has recently passed in Albany and I expect the Governor to sign it. I am hopeful that the Council will vote on this before the end of the summer. We should also find ways to support the health care industry, which is particularly important to my district, and our small businesses, which are critical to our economy.

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 support the overall concept of Mayoral control of the school system and am dismayed that the State Senate has failed to act on this important issue. I do not want to go back to the days of an unaccountable Board of Education. We learned the hard way that the old system doesn't work. Someone needs to be in charge, accountable, and responsible for our schools. And I think that someone should be the Mayor.

That said, absolute control with no checks and balances – and no public or parental input – is not the right way to go either.

The goal of any governance structure must be to ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain an excellent education that prepares them to be successful in their lives. I believe that in order to meet this larger goal a governance structure should meet the following three criteria:

- 1) There must be the opportunity for high levels of meaningful parental and community involvement.
- 2) There must be clear lines of accountability across the system.
- 3) There must be the authority to implement policies and reforms, even if they are not initially popular.

As it stands now, there is a clear line of authority in the DOE that runs directly to the Chancellor and then to the Mayor. And the Mayor and Chancellor have left no doubt that they have the authority and willingness to implement sweeping changes in the schools as they see fit. But they remain far too removed from the parents they serve.

Some changes need to be made to the current system ensure that parents are included in a meaningful way. First, some members of the Panel for Educational Policy should be parents and all members should be appointed to fixed two-year terms. PEP members have to have some measure of independence and be allowed to vote their conscience without fear of removal. As it currently stands, PEP members serve at the pleasure of the Mayor and can be removed at any time – or prior to any vote on which they disagree with the mayor. Allowing them some measure of independence will force the mayor to make his case for proposed policies rather than simply announcing them as a fait accompli. This will require the opening of a dialogue that has been sorely lacking under the current system.

Second, there needs to be an increase in the mid-level authority of the community superintendents and community education councils. Under the current structure, the superintendants and CECs don't have any real authority. All of the real decision-making abilities are centralized in Tweed, far removed from community input. If we want to allow parents to have a say in how their schools are governed, we need to bring some of that governance closer to the schools and the parents. I

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am not advocating for a return to the totally decentralized community school board structure, but there should be community superintendents with real power and the ability to manage the day to day operations of their districts within the framework set at the city-wide level by the chancellor and PEP.

Third, we should increase community involvement in electing community education council members. Currently, CEC members are elected by select officers in the PTAs of the schools in the district. Voting eligibility should be extended to all parents in the school at a special PTA meeting. Expanding eligibility could give more parents a greater voice in the process. This, combined with an increase in community-level authority, will allow the CECs to provide a meaningful forum for community involvement.

If we know that schools succeed when parents are included, why would we allow a school governance structure that can exclude parents? Mayoral control should be renewed, but it must be renewed with changes. Provisions must be added to the law to ensure avenues for meaningful parental and community involvement.

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?

In recent years, the Board of Elections has done things to become more transparent, like holding public meetings and making more information available online. That is a step in the right direction. Hiring well-qualified individuals based on merit and paying them appropriate wages would also go a long way towards modernizing and professionalizing the Board. The salaries for comparable positions at the Campaign Finance Board are significantly higher. Pay equity would help attract candidates to the BOE.

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?

Last year, the Council implemented reforms that were a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, as recent arrests have shown, these reforms did not do enough to root out corruption. While Council Members now disclose these relationships on forms and at meetings, these written disclosures should be made readily and easily available to the public and the press to further enhance transparency.



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. Improve the quality of our public schools – both in District 5 and across our city: As Chair of Land Use Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses, I have overseen the approximately 37,000 new public school seats in the last 3 years. Those seats will help relieve overcrowding, reduce class size, and give 37,000 children a better environment to learn. On the East Side, I played a large role in bringing a new PS 151 to our community this fall and adding capacity to the new East Side Middle School facility. I also secured city funds for local elementary schools for arts education, after-school programming and operational needs.
2. Work with tenants to strengthen the rent laws: I voted for home rule in the City Council, testified against rent increases, and worked with tenants one on one to help them.
3. Fight the 91st Street Marine Transfer Station: I voted against the Mayor's misguided plan in the Sanitation Committee and on the Floor of the Full Council. I was disappointed that it passed over my objections, but I continue to work with the community and other elected officials to defeat it.
4. Use my experience to make sure the City Council enacts balanced responsible budgets: Worked with my colleagues to craft and pass four on-time, balanced, and responsible budgets.
5. Tackle quality of life issues: Worked with thousands of constituents and neighborhood organizations to improve our quality of life.

TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. Continue to focus on improving public education.
2. Use the land use process to approve sensible development and improve our infrastructure.
3. Continue my work to expand transportation options on the East Side.
4. Work with tenants to preserve and create affordable housing.
5. Provide my constituents with thoughtful, caring, and prompt constituent service.