



CITIZENS UNION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ELECTION 2009

Citizens Union would appreciate your response 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: Leslie Crocker Snyder Age: 67

Campaign Address: PO Box 2076, Radio City Station, New York, NY 10101

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Party Affiliation(s): Democratic Campaign Manager Name: Josh Kriegman

Website&Email: www.SnyderforDA.com, info@snyderforda.com

Education: Radcliffe College, Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration, Case-Western Reserve

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Attorney and retired Judge at Rosowitz, Benson, Torres & Friedman, LLP

Previous Offices and Campaigns: New York State Supreme Court Judge, Judge of the Criminal Court of New York City, Head of the Arson Strike Force, Deputy Criminal Justice Coordinator, Attorney in Private Practice, Special Assistant Attorney General, Assistant District Attorney

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" or "Endorsed Candidate" rating only to candidates we have interviewed. We will make every effort to interview candidates in this race.)

Signature of Candidate: Leslie Crocker Snyder Date: 8/18/09

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DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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1. What trends do you see in criminal activity that the district attorney's office should address?

For more than 35 years I've been working in virtually all aspects of Manhattan's criminal justice system, and I've seen firsthand how the District Attorney's Office must be responsive to criminal trends and changing circumstances. In Manhattan today there are many areas of crime that need particular attention. Two examples:

White Collar Crime. As the financial capital of the world, Manhattan attracts criminals who operate in the shadows of our great financial institutions and businesses. These white-collar criminals commit acts that undermine the integrity of our financial markets and our government, increase the cost of doing business in the city, and devastate the personal finances of some of our residents and neighbors. The Manhattan District Attorney's Office has a long and proud tradition of bringing white-collar criminals to justice. As District Attorney, I will build on this legacy by leading a charge against criminals who prey on our most vulnerable residents, the elderly and the poor.

Domestic Violence. Domestic violence is a serious problem in every community. It is an under-reported crime because victims are often afraid to seek help. In light of this, it is important for the District Attorney's Office to actively reach out to support victims. Cooperating with victims will help ensure their safety and will help bring their abusers to justice. Through a number of initiatives, the District Attorney's Office will work with victims to combat domestic violence. This includes creating a separate Domestic Violence Bureau dedicated to handling only domestic violence cases, improving the use of evidence-based prosecutions, and working with the Mayor's Office to open a Family Justice Center in Manhattan.

While we work to adapt and respond to trends in criminal activity, the two fundamental priorities for the DA's Office must remain the same: First, we must continue to vigorously prosecute violent crime and ensure that violent offenders – the predators who commit the most heinous crimes -- receive strict penalties for their actions, when fairly convicted. And second, we must work to proactively prevent crime. For more than 20 years on the bench, I have supported alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent, first-time offenders by promoting programs that provide drug treatment, education, and job training; we must continue to advocate for and support such programs.

2. To what extent would your office use the district attorney's existing authority to investigate and monitor elected officials' conduct in relation to issues like campaign finance compliance and proper use of government resources and influence?

It is essential that elected officials are held accountable for violations of campaign finance law and improper use of government resources and influence. After serving for nine years in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office as an Assistant District Attorney, I became a Special Assistant Attorney General, prosecuting corruption in the criminal justice system, and I learned firsthand the challenges to effectively prosecuting cases of corruption. I think that it is crucial that the District Attorney maintain his or her independence from special interests, and in my campaign I have refused to make any promises that would compromise the integrity of the office in return for political support.

3. Are there statewide legislative reforms that you would advocate for if elected to office?

The DA's Office is at the forefront in the fight against crime and is in a unique position to identify areas of the law that need improvement. I saw this firsthand years ago as a prosecutor in the DA's office, when I fought for years to successfully change New York's unfair rape laws, and to pass the Rape Shield law to protect victims on the witness stand.

As District Attorney I will make sure the Manhattan DA's Office takes an active role in advocating for a wide range of statewide legislative reforms in many areas. Some examples:

Wrongful Convictions

* New legislation to standardize and improve evidence collection and storage procedures, so that crime scene evidence will not be lost or discarded.

* The creation of a "Commission of Inquiry" by the legislature to conduct extensive inquiries into post conviction exonerations not limited to DNA issues, to learn what errors were made and to recommend changes in procedures or legislation to prevent a repetition of injustice (Chief Judge Lippman has recently instituted a similar commission).

Gun Control

* Legislation to require microstamping. Although New York currently requires ballistic fingerprinting for all guns sold in the state, it has yet to require the use of microstamping technology. Ballistic fingerprinting only allows law enforcement to match a certain type of bullet to a certain type of gun, while microstamping engraves microscopic identifying markings on each fired casing, allowing law enforcement to

trace it to the specific firearm from which it was fired. This technology will make the investigation of gun crimes quicker and more efficient.

- * Repeal of the Tiahrt Amendments. These provisions must be repealed in order to facilitate cooperation between local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies and untie the hands of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Fostering this kind of collaboration is the most logical way to fight the kind of illegal gun trafficking that is not confined within any one state's borders.

- * Closing the gun show loophole and working hard to make sure it stays closed. While the law requires background checks in order to buy guns from licensed dealers, four out of every ten guns are still sold by unlicensed dealers without any check at all. Background checks are our greatest tool in making certain that guns do not fall into the wrong hands.

Traffic Safety

- * Legislation to establish effective prohibitions against driving distractions, such as text messaging.

Criminal Court

- * Legislation to enhance penalties for recidivistic misdemeanants.

- * Changes in the Penal Law and the Criminal Procedure law to expedite the criminal court process.

4. What do you think of the amendments to the Rockefeller drug laws enacted in 2009? What further changes, if any, would you advocate to these laws?

For over a decade I have been speaking out in favor of reforming the Rockefeller Drug Laws, and I am pleased that the New York State Legislature has recognized the need for change and taken steps to reform these ineffective and unfair laws.

As a judge for twenty years, I oversaw some of the toughest drug and gang cases this City has ever seen, and I developed and followed a dual philosophy: violent offenders and those who use weapons and young children to run large-scale drug operations should receive strict penalties for their actions; but young, nonviolent offenders must be given the opportunity to access alternatives to incarceration, drug treatment, job training and education. This is why for decades I consistently placed nonviolent offenders in programs such as Abraham House, a holistic alternative-to-incarceration program on whose board I am now proud to serve.

Judicial discretion and alternative sentencing, especially for nonviolent offenders, are essential components of our criminal justice system and are necessary for the most effective administration of justice. While I believe the recent reforms to the Rockefeller Drug Laws are a step in the right direction, it is too early to know what further changes must be made.

5. Do you believe more needs to be done to ease the re-entry of formerly incarcerated persons into society and if so, what would you propose?

Formerly incarcerated persons re-entering society face serious challenges that often force them back into a life of crime. They often return to the same high-crime neighborhood they came from, without job training, counseling, or adequate support services that would enable them to stay out of prison. In order to break the cycle of incarceration we must do more to help formerly incarcerated persons find job training and education programs.

As a judge I advocated strongly for the increased use of programs that help break the cycle of crime, and that give offenders the tools they need to return to society as law abiding citizens, not recidivist criminals. These programs must provide substance abuse treatment, counseling, job training, and education. The best programs recognize that an offender victimizes not only his or her intended target but also those in the family, including the children of the offender. It is imperative that those who are close to the offender also be given the tools to break the cycle that leads to repeated incarceration.

As District Attorney, I will advocate for funding for such programs that use a holistic model of rehabilitation -- for both the re-entry of formerly incarcerated persons, and also to help prevent young nonviolent offenders from being incarcerated in the first place.

6. What should the role of the district attorney be in addressing issues relating to terrorism? Do you have any concerns regarding possible jurisdictional overlaps with federal prosecutors?

As District Attorney, I will establish a trained team of experts in a single unit: the Counter-Terrorism Bureau. It will be headed by an Assistant District Attorney with the necessary security clearance to access classified information, and the experience to bring together otherwise disparate, disconnected investigations into a single effective investigation and prosecution based on a comprehensive strategy. We will bring to bear in a single Bureau experts who have experience in investigating all aspects of counter-terrorism, from the front organization raising funds, to the money-launderers who clean the money; from the facilitators who rent the apartments, to the importers who smuggle into our city weapons and other dangerous material into our city; from the drug dealers whose profits support the terrorist activities, to the forgers who prepare the false documents.

As we approach the eighth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office needs a Counter-Terrorism Bureau to coordinate the resources at its disposal to protect our citizens from another attack. In recent years we have seen impressive efforts by the New York City Police Department, and the prosecution of several significant international terrorist financing cases by the District Attorney's Office – now it is time to implement a systemic and coordinated information-sharing ability. A new Counter-Terrorism Bureau will link shared databases across units within the District Attorney's Office to ensure that information about related investigations is shared. Assistant District Attorneys from typically isolated units will be brought together for comprehensive briefings to foster coordinated and efficient information sharing.

7. Do you support the death penalty? Would you lobby for its reinstatement in New York State? If so, what criteria would you use to evaluate when the death penalty should be sought in a case?

No I do not support the death penalty and I will advocate against any reinstatement of it.

8. Do you feel that the number of incidents of police misconduct is a problem? What steps would you propose to deter police misconduct?

I would appoint someone in my office to report directly to me, to review all cases of racial profiling and any kind of misconduct. Therefore we will keep track of these cases, follow them closely, and I will be personally aware of them.

9. Knowing that the police department and commissioner retain ultimate authority for determining whether an officer is guilty and their 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?

This is something that I need to study further before committing to a position. I believe there is great value in the CCRB and it should be a strong watchdog of police conduct.

10. What is your position about the large increase in the number of people stopped annually by the police? Is this a productive crime-fighting technique and are you concerned about the civil liberties implications and with the fact that minorities are disproportionately stopped in relation to their percentage of the population?

Racial profiling is a serious problem facing New York City. Many New Yorkers have been subjected to unnecessary and unfair stops by police for no reason other than the color of their skin. Racial profiling undermines the reliability of our criminal justice system and creates dangerous tension between our citizens and police.

According to a 2007 study commissioned by the NYPD, 89% of all “stop-and-frisk” incidents in 2006 involved minorities. The same study found that police are more likely to frisk a Black or Hispanic pedestrian during a stop, and less likely to use force when arresting a White suspect. What’s more, only 10% of “stop-and-frisk” incidents in 2006 led to either an arrest or summons. These statistics highlight disturbing disparities.

We must reduce incidents of racial profiling and ensure that all New Yorkers are viewed equally under the law.

New Yorkers deserve better. We must take proactive steps to prevent racial profiling before it occurs and ensure that all New Yorkers are treated equally, regardless of race or ethnicity, at all points of contact with the criminal justice system. Specifically we must take serious measures including the following:

- Re-evaluate the standards NYPD officers use to determine when to stop an individual in a stop-and-frisk;
- Partner with the NYPD to prevent racial profiling before it starts by aiding the NYPD in designing and implementing mandatory cadet education programs to sensitize officers to racial profiling and cultural diversity issues;
- Expand mandatory education requirements for assistant district attorneys to include regular updates on relevant trends in peer-reviewed social science research including cross-racial eyewitness identification and unconscious racial bias;
- Partner with the NYPD to identify, investigate, and monitor officers and units that disproportionately stop minorities and work to support remedial retraining for officers and units where appropriate;
- Initiate a series of community training sessions to inform residents of their legal rights in stop-and-frisk situations;
- Support improved transparency by the NYPD in connection with its stop-and-frisk program;
- Establish a new position within the District Attorney’s Office, that will function as an internal watchdog to investigate racial disparities in law enforcement and other race and ethnicity-related impediments to the fair administration of justice,

including investigating the use of cross-racial identification jury instructions.

11. Do you support requiring that police interrogations be videotaped?

Yes. I've been advocating for years to institute a pilot program in Manhattan to videotape interrogations, to safeguard against coerced or false confessions and statements taken out of context, with the goal of convincing the NYPD to implement this procedure citywide. This is one of a number of important recommendations included in the 2006 Deskovic report, which was the result of a year-long wrongful conviction investigation for which I was the lead attorney.

12. What is your position regarding the Legal Aid Society's recently released proposals to overhaul New York's criminal discovery rules to allow criminal defendants easier and more automatic access to the prosecution's evidence?

I have been in favor of early discovery for years. I feel that it is fair and expedites case processing and inures to the benefit of both the defense and the prosecution. As Chair of the Chief Judges Criminal Procedure Law Committee for years, and a member for even longer, I advocated for and drafted a Discovery Reform Bill with other members of the committee.

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.

TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. I will offer alternatives to jail for first-time, non-violent offenders by promoting programs that provide education and job training.
2. I will establish a Counter-Terrorism Bureau, to swiftly identify and integrate the capabilities of multiple agencies and disciplines to defeat today's threats.
3. I will establish a Second Look Bureau to remedy prosecutorial mistakes and avoid wrongful convictions.
4. I will protect with renewed emphasis residents of Manhattan from white collar crimes; in particular we will hold accountable those who prey on our most vulnerable residents, especially the elderly and the poor.

5. I will create a specialized Housing Bureau to protect tenants struggling with abusive landlords, and residents of public housing plagued by crime and drugs.