



CITIZENS UNION CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE  
PUBLIC ADVOCATE  
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 request you 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 "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.

Thank you very much for your response.

Candidate Name:

Eric Gioia, Democrat, Age 36

Campaign Address:

Eric Gioia for New York  
236 36th St., Suite 131  
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Campaign Manager: Eli Richlin

Education: P.S. 11, I.S. 125, St. Francis Prep (High School), NYU, Georgetown Law

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held office): New York City Council (since 2002)

Previous Offices and Campaigns: City Council, 26th District (2001, 2003, 2005)

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

Signature of Candidate:

Date:

8.10.09



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Candidate Name:

Eric Gioia, Democrat, Age 36

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Signature of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

- |   |              |                            |
|---|--------------|----------------------------|
| 1. 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<br>X | Oppose                     |
| 2. What is your position on the passage of state legislation that would allow for other charter measures, such as those initiated by the City Council or by citizens, to appear on the ballot at the same time as when there is a charter reform proposal initiated by a charter commission appointed by the Mayor?   | Support<br>X | Oppose                     |
| 3. 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<br>X | Oppose                     |
| 4. 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<br>X | Oppose                     |
| 5. What is your position with respect to allowing voters who are registered as independents to vote in party primaries?   | Support<br>X | Oppose                     |
| 6. What is your position on term limits for elected officials?  | Support      | Oppose<br><i>See below</i> |
| 7. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that changes to term limits may only be approved by the voters?   | Support<br>X | Oppose                     |



Yet it's also clear that far too many New Yorkers feel invisible to City Hall. In neighborhoods across New York, I hear the same thing – no one in government is listening to their concerns, and if you're not wealthy or well-connected, no one in power really cares.

I speak every day with parents who feel like they have no voice in their children's education; subway and bus riders who don't understand why they're paying more but getting worse service; people who have worked hard for years and are worried about losing their jobs or getting priced out of their neighborhoods. Worse, a succession of scandals and a legacy of dysfunction have eroded the public's faith in the ability of government to make their lives better at all.

Some people say it's the Public Advocate's job to call attention to these issues – to speak out.

That's one of the things I've done as a City Councilman. I spent a week living on food stamps to call attention to the city's hunger crisis. I protested the MTA when they shut down 7 train service, cutting off Queens neighborhoods and businesses, and I called on them to give up their Madison Avenue offices before raising fares. When Con Edison left 100,000 New York residents without power for 10 days in 2006, I demanded accountability for their failures, and since then have repeatedly called on Con Ed to upgrade their infrastructure and to implement Smart Meters to improve efficiency, which they've recently begun.

I did it because someone needed to speak out, and as Public Advocate, I will be a forceful advocate for New Yorkers who don't have a voice at City Hall. But being a voice – simply talking – only gets you so far.

There are lots of jobs for people who only want to talk about issues. As Public Advocate, I will do more than talk – I'll work to solve problems.

In many ways, serving as Chair of the Oversight and Investigations Committee has been a perfect preparation to serve as Public Advocate:

- I've conducted investigations that spurred critical legislation, increasing access to emergency contraception, addressing the deplorable quality of housing the city provides to

New Yorkers living with HIV and AIDS, and helping thousands of citizens register to vote.

- When the city failed to protect tenants, I sued a landlord who was allowing the building to deteriorate, forcing him to make repairs and winning back rent for the tenants.
- I stood up to big business, suing Exxon Mobil to clean up Newtown Creek in Brooklyn, the biggest urban oil spill in North America, and demanding that Costco accept food stamps at their New York stores, leading Costco to concede.
- I've fought against government waste and mismanagement, and written laws that increase government transparency and accountability, and enable democratic participation, including the Young Adult Voter Registration Act.
- I worked with residents and business to bring the first bank to Queensbridge, the largest public housing development in America, giving residents an alternative to high-fee check-cashers and helping them begin to save and break the cycle of poverty.

As Public Advocate, I'll use every means at my disposal to solve problems and get things done. Whether it's proposing legislation and shepherding it to passage, using the Public Advocate's appointment to the City Planning Commission to push sustainable land use policies and affordable housing development, using the Public Advocate's seat on the city pension board to demand corporate responsibility, or working behind the scenes to bring government leaders, business, and citizens together, the next Public Advocate must both work within the confines of the office while challenging perceptions about its value. And at the end of the day, the Public Advocate must deliver results.

To me, that's what being Public Advocate is all about.

**10. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as public advocate?**

Ideas matter, and there a number of initiatives that I would immediately advance as Public Advocate to address pressing problems:

- 1) Getting Health Insurance for Uninsured Children: On the campaign trail, I've spoken to

parents who were putting health care costs on their credit cards even though their kids qualify for free or low-cost care. Cutting through the red tape to enroll them, much as we've done with food stamps, will be a top priority for me as Public Advocate – there are over 200,000 uninsured kids in New York City and around 70% of them qualify for free or low-cost health care.

- 2) Eliminating Government Waste: Cutting down on wasteful spending and government mismanagement must be a top priority. As Public Advocate I will continue to investigate the City's budgeting, programs, and contracts to make sure taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely – as I did when I exposed atrocious living conditions for homeless people with AIDS being paid for with public funding.
- 3) Keeping New York Affordable: More and more New Yorkers are getting squeezed out of their neighborhoods. Rents keep going up, foreclosures are up, and we are in real danger of losing the vital middle class. Preserving and creating affordable housing will be a key issue for the next Public Advocate, who has an important appointment to the City Planning Commission.

However, the Public Advocate is not the Mayor, and the office does not have the structural power to simply implement solutions. The nature of the office requires that the Public Advocate be creative enough to use a variety of approaches to solve problems, and to be nimble enough to dedicate resources where they will have the maximum impact.

Therefore, my number one priority will be to listen to regular New Yorkers and get to work helping them solve problems. I've found that by going in with an open mind and listening to people, you may come across issues you would have never thought to work on. In 2002, when I first took office, I came to the issue of child hunger when teachers told me about kids performing poorly in class because they weren't getting enough to eat at home; addressing hunger became one of my top priorities, and I have spent the past eight years working to remedy the problem.

#### **11. What are the three most important oversight functions of the Public Advocate?**

- 1) Oversight over City Agencies: The Office of Public Advocate was preserved through Charter reform to serve as an intermediary between the public and government. For far

too many New Yorkers, city government is a frustrating morass of red tape and bureaucracy, more concerned with completing paperwork than improving people's lives.

It's something I've encountered up close as Chair of the City Council's Oversight and Investigations Committee over the past eight years, where I've found food stamp applications lengthier than my background check to work in the White House, an unresponsive agency turning a blind eye to deplorable living conditions for homeless New Yorkers with AIDS, and widespread failures to enforce important laws. The Public Advocate must remain open and accessible to listen to the stories of real New Yorkers when government fails them, and then ensure that the city's tax dollars aren't being wasted.

- 2) Oversight of the City Budget: Because the Public Advocate occupies a quasi-legislative position, participating in the city's lawmaking affairs while retaining oversight and investigatory resources, maintaining an independent check over both the Mayor and the City Council remains a key function. While the Mayor, the Council, and even the Comptroller deal with the budget more directly, it's clear that the current process has failed New Yorkers – the budget remains far too opaque, waste is legion, and New Yorkers have lost all confidence in the basic merit of many funded programs and initiatives.

While in the City Council, I've sought to alleviate these problems by proposing a Sarbanes-Oxley model for the city budget that would require the Council Speaker and Finance Director to personally verify the contents of the budget; I've also proposed a "Google Government," utilizing transparency measures to allow the public to more easily track public expenditures. I'll continue this work as Public Advocate – to remain a strong and independent voice, to identify areas where governmental resources are being wasted or misused for the benefit of powerful insiders, and to safeguard the public till. Only by doing so can we rebuild public trust in government.

- 3) Participation on the City Pension Board: The Public Advocate is a trustee of the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS), the City's largest retirement system with over \$40 billion in assets. While maintaining a fiduciary responsibility to the City's



hundreds of thousands of retirees who depend upon NYCERS for retirement benefits, the Public Advocate should also utilize that seat to see that the Board charts a responsible investment strategy. I've pushed for divestment from tobacco companies, and companies that do business with Sudan because City dollars shouldn't go to support genocide, and as Public Advocate I'll keep a watchful eye over NYCERS funds.

**12. How would you leverage the office of the Public Advocate to address:**

- a. Affordable Housing,
- b. Education,
- c. Budget and Fiscal Responsibility,
- d. Health and the Environment, and
- e. Economic Development?

a) Affordable Housing

Ensuring that middle-class New Yorkers, and those working to get there, can continue to live in New York City has been one of my top priorities as an elected official, and will continue to be as Public Advocate. As I travel around the City talking to regular New Yorkers, I am often reminded of my sister, who is a public school teacher, and her husband, who is a corrections officer. Theirs used to be solidly middle class incomes, that you could comfortably live and raise a family on in the City. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case.

The number of New Yorkers living in “unaffordable housing,” spending more than 30% of their income on housing, has risen precipitously, going from 36.7% in 2000 to 46% in 2006. Further, recent studies have shown that 28% of New York households who rent spend a full 50% of their income on rent, preventing families from saving money, and forcing them to live month to month and paycheck to paycheck – a situation which is highly tenuous and unstable for families. The middle class is literally being squeezed out of the City, and if we want to ensure that New York remains the greatest City in the world, we need to find a way to reverse this trend.

First, we need to preserve existing affordable housing stock. I support the repeal of the Urstadt Law to bring control of the City's rent regulated housing stock back to New York City. In addition, as an attorney, organizer and public official, I have fought unscrupulous landlords in

court and on the street. A large part of the success we've had in my district has come by organizing tenants, partnering with community organizations, and increasing city enforcement of all too often ignored laws. In particular, we've been fighting “predatory equity.” As Public Advocate I will continue to be a strong advocate for tenants – including those in rent-regulated buildings.

Second, we need to do a lot more for the 400,000 people who live in public housing – a city within a city. For too long, public housing has been marginalized, with developments stuck under bridges or on the outskirts of the city. Without connecting public housing to other resources, we will never help people break out of the cycle of poverty.

Third, we need to create more affordable housing. I was proud to shepherd through the first ever inclusionary zoning plan in Queens – which the *Daily News* called “A Plan to Save Queens.” We have since included inclusionary zoning in two other areas of my district. I’ve worked with the City since passing these rezonings to implement a program to allow affordable homeownership – allowing low and moderate income New Yorkers to build equity and invest in neighborhoods. Additionally, in my district we have passed a plan for the largest affordable housing development in decades, a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Stuyvesant Town on the Queens waterfront. This development, called Hunters Point South, will create thousands of jobs and over 3,000 affordable housing units for both low-income and middle-income families. As Public Advocate, I’ll continue to explore building on broad boulevards, along the waterfront and on top of railyard decks – areas that have gone underutilized but where smart, sensible, and sustainable development, connected to mass transportation and as a part of mixed-use communities, can have a big impact.

b) Education

Progress has been made in New York City schools, but with a dropout rate of 13.5%, and with only 56.4% of students graduating high school in four years – including 51.4% of African American and 48.7% of Latino students (versus 71.5% of Whites), and only 35.8% of English language learning students – it's clear that much more needs to be done. Without even a high school degree, young people are trapped at the edges of society, and their options are limited, particularly in difficult economic times. Over 163,000 youth ages 16-24 are neither in school nor

in the workforce.<sup>1</sup> These “disconnected youth” – whose numbers swell to almost 220,000 when you factor in those seeking work but still unemployed – represent a lost generation without hope of a better future.

For too long, the education debate reform has been hampered by an excessive focus on issues that don't move our schools forward. We must move beyond political posturing to focus on the issues that enable learning, increase graduation rates, and lead to better student achievement.

We know what to do to measurably improve our schools, to take steps like extending the school day, extending the school year, providing universal preschool and pre-K, and integrating schools within the city's social service networks. The problem is that many of these initiatives require dramatic changes to the school system, and a sizable financial investment. Yet these obstacles cannot stop discussion about the steps we should take to give our kids a better education. As Public Advocate, I'll help lead a frank conversation about priorities, and deciding what our children – and our city's future – are worth, while making sure that parents, teachers, administrators, advocates, and all stakeholders have a voice in the process. Now is the time to consider bold action to move our schools forward.

c) Budget and Fiscal Responsibility

Because the Public Advocate occupies a quasi-legislative position, participating in the city's lawmaking affairs while retaining oversight and investigatory resources, maintaining an independent check over both the Mayor and the City Council remains a key function. While the Mayor, the Council, and even the Comptroller deal with the budget more directly, it's clear that the current process has failed New Yorkers – the budget remains far too opaque, waste is legion, scandals have revealed money allocated to fake organizations or stolen directly by public officials and their cronies, and as a result New Yorkers have lost all confidence in the basic merit of many funded programs and initiatives.

While in the City Council, I've sought to alleviate these problems by proposing a Sarbanes-Oxley model for the city budget that would require the Council Speaker and Finance Director to personally verify the contents of the budget; I've also proposed a “Google Government” model,

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<sup>1</sup> Community Service Society. Out of Focus. June 2008.

utilizing transparency measures to allow the public to more easily track public expenditures. I'll continue this work as Public Advocate – to remain a strong and independent voice, to identify areas where governmental resources are being wasted or misused for the benefit of powerful insiders, and to safeguard the public till. Only by doing so can we rebuild public trust in Government.

Finally, it's clear that in this time of economic crisis, we need a plan to address projected future budget deficits. Such a plan will certainly have to include some mix of tax increases and budget cuts, and I'll use the Public Advocate's office to ensure that the city adheres to principles of fiscal responsibility. I believe that progressive taxation continues to be the fairest and most effective. A millionaire's tax makes far more sense than increasing the sales tax, especially given a recent study demonstrating that such a tax would be unlikely to cause flight of the city's tax base. Additionally, as Public Advocate I'll aggressively promote programs like civil legal services that “pay for themselves” by preventing families from becoming homeless, and I'll work to ensure that eligible New Yorkers receive benefits like food stamps, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and school meals, all programs that will bring federal dollars back to New York.

d) Health and the Environment

On the campaign trail, I've spoken to parents who were putting health care costs on their credit cards even though their kids qualify for free or low-cost care – there are over 200,000 uninsured kids in New York City and around 70% of them qualify for free or low-cost health care. Cutting through the red tape to enroll them, much as we've done with food stamps, will be a top priority for me as Public Advocate.

Access to affordable, quality health care is a right, and every New Yorker should be able to receive health coverage at least as good as the government officials who represent them. After the death of Manny Lanza, a man with a serious but treatable brain condition who reportedly was refused health care by a hospital because he lacked insurance, I worked to pass Manny's Law to ensure that even New Yorkers without health insurance can receive care and be offered payment plans at hospitals. I've followed up with investigations to make sure the law gets enforced, and as Public Advocate I'll continue to do so.

Family planning is a critical part of comprehensive health care, and as such should be a part of any universal health coverage plan. I am a firm believer in protecting a woman's right to choose, but even people who disagree on choice should agree that reducing the times when a woman needs to make that choice is desirable. Therefore, I have written and sponsored laws which provide access to emergency contraception and advise women of that option in pharmacies, health clinics, and emergency rooms. I've then ardently enforced those laws, conducting numerous investigations to ensure that every woman actually receives the access to which she is entitled to under the law. As Public Advocate, I'll continue to be vigilant in protecting the rights we've fought so hard to achieve.

Safeguarding public health also means keeping New York's air safe to breathe and water safe to drink. Sadly, for far too many New Yorkers, the city's environment poses serious threats to health and safety. A child who lives in East Harlem is over ten times as likely to be hospitalized for asthma as a child on the Upper East Side, and hospitalization rates for kids in New York due to asthma are almost twice the national average. For decades, an oil spill 50% larger than the Exxon Valdez has festered in Newtown Creek and under the soil in Brooklyn and Queens. Large volumes of storm water overwhelm city sewage systems, causing 27 billion gallons of raw sewage and polluted storm water to be discharged every year into local waters, and New York's drinking water supply faces contamination from development in our upstate watershed.

In the City Council, I've drawn attention to these issues and worked to provide solutions. From activating police crackdowns on trucks illegally using residential roads to investigating bus idling times and finding that over 30% were idling for longer than the legal limit, to supporting the mayor's congestion pricing plan in the face of local opposition, I've worked to help clean our air and protect our kids' health. My lawsuit against Exxon Mobil to clean up the Newtown Creek spill has now drawn in the state Attorney General and federal lawmakers. And I've secured funding for the East River Greenway, leveraging additional millions in federal funding to create a greenway that would connect with Brooklyn and run the entire length of the river. As Public Advocate, I'll continue to stand up to polluters and protect the environment.

Finally, as Public Advocate I'll promote a sustainability agenda that reduces the city's carbon footprint, ensures PlaNYC 2030 gets implemented, and creates new "green collar" jobs. Because

nearly 80% of New York City's carbon emissions come from buildings, we need enhanced green building standards, and we should require regular energy audits in city buildings, and when commercial buildings are sold. The Public Advocate can play a key role in overseeing that city agencies maintain best energy efficiency practices, as when I discovered many city agencies leave their lights burning twenty-four hours a day. And sustainability also requires investing in our mass transportation infrastructure, which remains a key economic driver for the entire metropolitan region.

e) Economic Development

The basic promise of New York City is that no matter who you are, where you come from, how much money you've got in the bank or what language you speak at home, you will have the opportunity to work hard and make a better life for your family. The recent economic crisis and rising unemployment rates have endangered that promise, and to ensure that it holds for the next generation, we must take concrete steps to transform New York's economy.

As Public Advocate, I'll promote economic opportunity to ensure that all New Yorkers get a fair shot. That starts by making financial institutions available, and protecting vulnerable New Yorkers from disreputable tax preparers and businesses that charge usurious lending rates. I've shone a light on predatory institutions, passed legislation to strengthen the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, and matched volunteer accountants with New Yorkers who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, bringing back over 8 million dollars in tax refunds over the last five years. And working with local clergy and community leaders, we brought Amalgamated Bank to Queensbridge Houses, the largest public housing development in North America, and started financial literacy and homeownership classes that have enabled around 20 families so far to move from public housing to homeownership.

Small businesses remain a critical engine for the city's economy, numbering over 200,000, and as Public Advocate, I'll continue to cut government red tape and provide support services to allow them to succeed. Growing up in the back of the flower shop my family's run in Queens for the past hundred years has given me a firsthand understanding of the challenges that small business owners face. To provide support, I've sponsored local Business Improvement Districts and merchant associations, and worked to keep neighborhoods in my district safe and clean.

Finally, we must also recognize that the sectors that provide New Yorkers with jobs in the next hundred years will be different than those that powered the city's economy over the past hundred years. As Public Advocate, I'll continue to promote an economic development plan that recognizes what NYU President John Sexton calls the move from a FIRE (Finance, Insurance & Real Estate) to ICE (Intellectual, Cultural and Educational) economy, and support cultural institutions, colleges and universities across the City. I'll work to update our laws to allow independent workers to participate in unpaid wage claim systems and to set aside pre-tax dollars for unemployment protection to reflect the new necessities of our modern-day economy. And by strengthening the City's Building code and requiring regular energy audits for city buildings, we can create thousands of new "green collar" jobs, as the Mayor recognized in his State of the City several months ago. As Public Advocate, I'll fight to enact the proposed reforms.

**13. What is your position on the role of the Public Advocate in addressing complaints on broad citywide issues versus limiting the Public Advocate's oversight to specific issues?**

As Public Advocate, I'll focus relentlessly on results. No matter what size issue I confront, from citywide housing policy and reducing child hunger, to attracting a bank in a new neighborhood, to conducting robust oversight over city agencies, my measure of success will be the real people whose lives I impact. And I've found that when you listen to real people, learn the problems they face, and commit to working with them to solve them, solutions to citywide problems often become apparent as well.

In fact, individual cases often offer an insight into much larger systemic problems. My experiences expanding access to food stamps, helping eligible families apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit, revealing systematic failures by HASA to provide adequate housing for people with HIV and AIDS, and expanding afterschool extracurricular programs all grew from stories real people told me about the difficulties they faced. Yet the solution to these individual problems came by expanding a lens and identifying broad approaches to address underlying conditions.

As the second-highest elected official in the city, I won't hesitate to stand up and speak out against powerful interests when I think it's right. And the office must continue to serve as an advocate for those who feel like City Hall has shut them out, engaging with and serving constituents who seek assistance. But the next Public Advocate can neither get lost in the small-bore, nor serve as an empty mouthpiece to spout inconsequential opinions. To answer the office's persistent critics, as Public Advocate, I'll focus relentlessly on results.

**14. How would you publicize the Public Advocate's office and its role?**

People often define the Public Advocate's power as the ability of the office holder to make use of the bully pulpit. Certainly the office's status as the second-highest in the City, and one of only three citywide officeholders, lends the Public Advocate stature. Yet far too many New Yorkers remain unsure on how the office can help them, and indeed unaware that the office even exists.

Remedying this condition is necessary, and as Public Advocate I'll take clear steps to do so. The goal, however, can't be simply to make the office, or the officeholder, better known. My goal will be to prove to New Yorkers that the Public Advocate can make their lives better – by giving parents a voice in their children's education, by protecting affordable housing, by creating economic opportunity for working people and the middle class. Once New Yorkers see results, they'll realize that the Public Advocate can be a problem solver, and they'll start to recognize the value in the office.

**15. 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?**

The most important thing we do as a government is educate our children, and the most important teacher in a child's life is a parent. We have to make it easier as a city to be a good parent, and also to make sure parents are seen as assets and partners for a school's success. That should start beginning with pre-natal instruction or in the hospital at birth, and continue through a child's life.



It is the job of good city government to make sure every parent feels secure in their child's public school education, and while schools have improved in recent years, too many parents in New York City drop their children off for school in the morning, worry all day about what's going on in that school, and go home wondering why they don't have more of a voice in their children's education. That needs to change. The number one thing we can do is have independent auditing of the school system so that parents aren't solely relying on DOE statistics as they make crucial decisions about their children's education. Reducing the reliance on testing would be another good step that gives teachers more control over their classroom.

But there are far bigger issues to tackle – for too long we've been having the wrong debate about public schools. We know how to make schools better. We need to start by ensuring every child in New York City begins school at age three. School days should go until 5pm, providing opportunities for children to participate in athletics and arts education, learning skills that are essential to growth and development. And the school year needs to be longer so that teachers don't spend half of September needing to re-teach what students have forgotten since June. This plan would certainly cost a lot, but that's the kind of frank discussion about priorities that we should be having in this City.

**16. 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 do you think should be done to address the MTA's fiscal solvency issues and ensure that the burden for funding the MTA are equitably distributed amongst all stakeholders?**

Right now, transit riders are looking at paying more for less – when they already pay the highest burden of riders in any transit system in the country. Simply raising fares on riders while ignoring long-term needs can not continue. We need to take a serious look at the MTA's finances and identify opportunities for cost-cutting measures like selling or leasing some of their prime real estate holdings. At the same time, there's no question that we need to fund long-term investment that will keep our mass transit system an integral driver of the metropolitan region, and that funding must necessarily come from a variety of places, including from automobile drivers and those who live outside New York City. That's a prime reason that I supported congestion pricing

when it came before the City Council and why I believe that given the MTA's fiscal situation, that proposal should be revisited. Additionally, I also support key Ravitch Commission recommendations involving reforms to the MTA's governance structure to increase accountability and transparency in the agency's finances and operations.

New York has one of the most admirable mass transit systems in the world, which helps make us an energy efficient city. But to continue encouraging people to use mass transportation, we must invest in our infrastructure for the future.

a) Congestion Pricing: Even though it was incredibly unpopular in my district and my borough, I was proud to vote in favor of congestion pricing, a plan that would have both reduced congestion in Manhattan's central business district and surrounding neighborhoods while addressing air pollution, reducing carbon emissions and providing a dedicated funding stream for the MTA. Anyone who voted against congestion pricing should be called to answer for that vote. We can also target congestion by reducing parking permits for city employees, and more explicitly tracking parking needs in areas of rapid growth. For new developments, we should include parking needs in the city's Zoning Resolutions, and limit parking for areas near mass transportation.

b) Addressing gridlock: Classifying blocking an intersection as a parking violation, in addition to being a moving violation, was a good step, and we need to make sure blocking the box is strictly enforced. The city should also ramp up enforcement of bus-only lanes – reserving these lanes for bus-only usage can limit pollution and encourage bus ridership by speeding up bus times. Increasing penalties for both of these violations will help address gridlock and improve air quality.

c) Expanding bus, subway and rail access to underserved neighborhoods: In areas where the subway can't provide adequate service, we should implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) program to efficiently transport New Yorkers from the boroughs directly to the urban core.

d) Expand ferry service and create a transportation network along city waterways: The City should do more to subsidize ferry service and integrate ferries into the transit system connecting commuters to all five boroughs. I envision a day when fast ferries dot the East River waterfront, and one card can be used to move from subway to bus to ferry.

e) Create livable communities & implement sustainable land use policies: Before expanding outward, we need to begin reclaiming parts of the city that have gone unused. In New York, that means identifying places like formerly industrialized waterfronts and engaging in remediation, as well as making railyard lands available for other uses by exploring table tops. For example, a deck on the Sunnyside Railyards could support thousands of units of housing and opportunities for commerce, and with easy access to mass transportation would obviate the need for suburban expansion. Further, the city must encourage mixed use development that will allow New Yorkers to reside in livable communities, and to walk or bike to work.

**17. What would you propose to ensure that charter mandated elected offices receive equitable budget allocations?**

The Public Advocate in particular needs an independent budget. While we all need to tighten our belts in tough economic times, the cuts to the office were disproportionate, unwise and unwarranted. It's not good policy to have the watchdog's budget subject to the whim of those being watched.

The answer is to structure the budget similarly to that of the Independent Budget Office (IBO), where it's pegged to another indicator (in the IBO's case, a set percentage of the City Council budget, though it could be pegged to any number of indicators). The key point is to have structural independence.

**18. How would you propose the city deal with affordable housing?**

Ensuring that middle-class New Yorkers, and those working to get there, can continue to live in New York City has been one of my top priorities as an elected official, and will continue to be as Public Advocate. As I travel around the City talking to regular New Yorkers, I am often reminded of my sister, who is a public school teacher, and her husband, who is a corrections officer. Theirs used to be solidly middle class incomes, that you could comfortably live and raise a family on in the City. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case.

The number of New Yorkers living in “unaffordable housing,” spending more than 30% of their income on housing, has risen precipitously, going from 36.7% in 2000 to 46% in 2006. Further, recent studies have shown that 28% of New York households who rent spend a full 50% of their income on rent, preventing families from saving money, and forcing them to live month to month and paycheck to paycheck - a situation which is highly tenuous and unstable for families. The middle class is literally being squeezed out of the City, and if we want to ensure that New York remains the greatest City in the world, we need to find a way to reverse this trend.

First, we need to preserve existing affordable housing stock. I support the repeal of the Urstadt Law to bring control of the City's rent regulated housing stock back to New York City. In addition, as an attorney, organizer and public official, I have fought unscrupulous landlords in court and on the street. A large part of the success we've had in my district has come by organizing tenants, partnering with community organizations, and increasing city enforcement of all too often ignored laws. In particular, we've been fighting “predatory equity.” As Public Advocate I will continue to be a strong advocate for tenants – including those in rent-regulated buildings.

Second, we need to do a lot more for the 400,000 people who live in public housing – a city within a city. For too long, public housing has been marginalized, with developments stuck under bridges or on the outskirts of the city. Without connecting public housing to other resources, we will never help people break out of the cycle of poverty.

Third, we need to create more affordable housing. I was proud to shepherd through the first ever inclusionary zoning plan in Queens – which the *Daily News* called “A Plan to Save Queens.” We have since included inclusionary zoning in two other areas of my district. I've worked with the City since passing these rezonings to implement a program to allow affordable homeownership – allowing low and moderate income New Yorkers to build equity and invest in neighborhoods. Additionally, in my district we have passed a plan for the largest affordable housing development in decades, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Stuyvesant Town on the Queens waterfront. This development, called Hunters Point South, will create thousands of jobs and over 3,000 affordable housing units for both low-income and middle-income families. As Public Advocate, I'll continue to explore

building on broad boulevards, along the waterfront and on top of railyard decks – areas that have gone underutilized but where smart, sensible, and sustainable development, connected to mass transportation and as a part of mixed-use communities, can have a big impact.

**19. What would you propose to further enhance transparency regarding the relationships between elected officials, their families, and nonprofits that receive funding from New York City?**

The City should immediately scrap the current member item process, which is too ripe for abuse. When I voted against this year's budget, I did so not because there were not great programs funded, but because I was afraid that, as I stated during my vote, “over the coming year there will be investigations and revelations that embarrass every one of us.” Sadly, it was less than a month later that Miguel Martinez resigned and pled guilty to fraud relating to member items.

It shouldn't take a newspaper, and it certainly shouldn't take a grand jury, to uncover waste, mismanagement, and fraud. I think we can do better, and I think we need to do better to rebuild people's faith in government, and that means wholesale reform. The worst thing about the Council's slush fund scandal is that the revelations are no longer shocking. We've become inured.

After it was revealed that there were fictitious placeholder groups being allocated funding in the city budget, I called for the creation of a Sarbanes-Oxley for the City Council that would require the Speaker and Finance Director to personally certify that the budget was true to the best of their knowledge. This reform should be adopted. The Council has failed to honor even minor reforms like a 24-hour waiting period between a budget being finalized and a Council vote; in fact, the waiting period should be expanded to at least 48 hours to allow members, good government groups and citizens to review the budget and understand its details. The member item system should be replaced with an RFP process, and at the very least decoupled from the rest of the budget so that members can examine and vote on it separately from funds for schools, cops, firehouses, libraries, and the rest of essential city functions. These proposals are a starting place, but it's clear that the time for dramatic reforms has long past arrived.

**Additional Comments:**

Thank you to all the board members, staff, volunteers and citizen activists who make Citizens Union such a vibrant and important civic institution to this day. For over a century, Citizens Union has been a leading voice on behalf of good government, keeping voters informed and promoting democratic accountability, and the need for that work has certainly not waned.

I'm running for Public Advocate to serve as an honest and independent representative for all New Yorkers at the highest levels of government, to implement necessary reforms and solve problems that make a real difference in people's lives. Over the past eight years on the City Council, I've sought to improve schools, provide housing people can afford, and make government work better, and I'll continue that work as Public Advocate.

When I first ran for City Council in 2001, I ran and beat the party machine, and as difficult as that was, without the city's model campaign finance system, it would have been impossible. Since then I've sought to protect the Campaign Finance Act and advance its goals, sponsoring legislation to limit contributions from lobbyists and LLCs, partnerships and people doing business with the city. And in my own campaign, I've increased participation directly by eliminating minimum contributions to my fundraising events, an approach that has allowed more New Yorkers to get involved and one that has led more people to contribute to my campaign than to any other candidate for any office in the city.

In the Council I've continued to chart an independent course and stand up for what I believe is right, voting for congestion pricing and the smoking ban, and standing firm on gay rights and a woman's right to choose, despite the deep unpopularity of those positions in parts of my district. I opposed the Mayor, the City Council Speaker, and an array of political bosses in voting against extending term limits because I believed the people had already spoken through two ballot initiatives, and for the legislature to subvert those clear statements would undermine faith in democracy. I donate my committee stipend, or "lulu," to charity. After the City Council slush fund scandals, I proposed a Sarbanes-Oxley model to increase accountability over the city budget, and I was the lone Councilmember to vote against the budget this year because insufficient protections had been implemented to ensure its integrity.

Over the past eight years in the City Council, and as Chair of the Council's Oversight and Investigations Committee, I've identified government waste and mismanagement, and strengthened whistleblower protections. I've authored laws that increase transparency, demand accountability, and enable democratic participation, including the Young Adult Voter Registration Act that provides voter registration forms to graduating high school seniors.

As Public Advocate, I'll continue to demand accountability and transparency from the Council, the Mayor, and every city agency. I'll work to increase democratic participation and open ballot access, and use all of the office's powers to require that city government and powerful interests respond to the will of the people. And I'll continue to press the reforms necessary to restore public confidence in our elected officials.

Over the past eight years, I've been proud to work with Citizens Union as a partner. I look forward to doing the same as Public Advocate over the next four years, and I would be proud to have Citizens Union's support.

## 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 currently holds an office other than the one for which you are running,

- 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 or why have you not fulfilled those promises?
- b. what are your top five campaign promises you are making to voters during your campaign for this new 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. Fight to keep our neighborhood affordable: Over the past four years, I have worked to preserve existing affordable housing stock by fighting unscrupulous landlords in court and on the street, organizing tenants, partnering with community organizations, and increasing city enforcement of all too often ignored laws. In particular, we've been combatting "predatory equity." In addition, we passed the first every inclusionary zoning plan in Queens, on Queens Boulevard, and then did the same thing in Dutch Kills and on the Long Island City waterfront, where we also shepherded through the largest single project to create affordable housing for the middle class since the 1970s. What I'm very proud of as well is convincing the city to try out a plan for affordable homeownership – allowing low and moderate income New Yorkers to build equity and invest in neighborhoods.
2. Combat child hunger: I began working on this issue my first term in office, but so long as children are going to be hungry in New York City, the work will not stop. Since 2005 we've taken great strides, including passing a law to put food stamp applications online, which will be implemented by the administration at the end of this year; getting Costco to accept food stamps at New York locations; and advocating for food stamp benefits to be



- indexed to inflation.
3. Protect New Yorkers from predatory lending: To help hard-working New Yorkers, we dramatically expanded volunteer tax preparation services, bringing back millions of dollars in the Earned Income Tax Credit. At the same time, I passed a bill strengthening the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, to better protect New Yorkers from high-interest Refund Anticipation Loans (RALs).
  4. Expand economic justice: I helped shine a light on predatory institutions, passed legislation to strengthen the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, and matched volunteer accountants with New Yorkers who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, bringing back over 8 million dollars in tax refunds over the last five years. And working with local clergy and community leaders, we brought Amalgamated Bank to Queensbridge Houses, where there hadn't a bank within walking distance for decades. It's a profitable bank today, and with financial literacy and homeownership classes we've enabled around 20 families so far to move from public housing to homeownership.
  5. Clean up the Queens waterfront and improving waterfront access: Continuing on earlier work to raise awareness of the massive underground oil spill in Newtown Creek, we sued Exxon Mobil and have made great strides in bringing State and Federal resources to bear on this environmental disaster. At the same time, we're opening up the East River waterfront with new parks and have secured funding for a greenway to run the length of the river, leveraging additional millions in federal funding.

### **TOP FIVE 2009 CAMPAIGN PROMISES**

1. Health Insurance: On the campaign trail, I've spoken to parents who were putting health insurance on their credit cards even though their kids qualify free free or low-cost care. Cutting through the red tape to enroll them, much as we've done with food stamps, will be a top priority for me as Public Advocate – there are over 200,000 uninsured kids in New York City and around 70% of them qualify for free or low-cost health care.
2. Eliminating Government Waste: Cutting down on wasteful spending and government mismanagement must be a top priority. As Public Advocate I will continue to investigate the City's budgeting, programs, and contracts to make sure taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely – as I did when I exposed atrocious living conditions for homeless AIDS patients being paid for with public funding.

3. Keeping New York Affordable: More and more New Yorkers are getting squeezed out of their neighborhoods. Rents keep going up, foreclosures are up, and we are in real danger of losing the vital middle class. Preserving and creating affordable housing will be a key issue for the next Public Advocate, who has an important appointment to the City Planning Commission.
4. Providing Access to Food to Hungry New Yorkers: We've made progress by reducing the food stamp application from 24 pages down to 4 and convincing Costco to start accepting food stamps. Congress recently moved to adjust the food stamp allotment based on inflation, and the Mayor has finally agreed to start allowing New Yorkers to apply for food stamps online. As Public Advocate I'll continue oversight over New York's efforts to feed hungry New Yorkers, including through free breakfasts for students in school classrooms.
5. Protecting the Environment: Safeguarding public health also means keeping New York's air safe to breathe and water safe to drink. Sadly, for far too many New Yorkers, the city's environment poses serious threats to health and safety. As Public Advocate, I'll continue to stand up to polluters and protect the environment, and I'll promote a sustainability agenda that reduces the city's carbon footprint, ensures PlaNYC 2030 gets implemented, and creates new "green collar" jobs.