



## 2013 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR CITY COUNCIL

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 residents 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.

If you seek our support, we would also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. We will not automatically schedule an interview with you if you return this questionnaire, as we prioritize competitive races and resources constrain us from evaluating all races. Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed. We thank you very much for your response.

Candidate Name: Dennis J. Saffran Age: 57

Campaign Address: 40-18 Bell Blvd; Bayside, NY 11361

Campaign Telephone Number: (718) 225-0757 Fax: (718) 225-0746

Party Affiliation(s): R-C Campaign Manager Name: David Zuniga

Website & Email: www.saffran2013.com; Dennis@saffran2013.com

Education: Forest Hills HS; Harvard College, BA; New York Univ Law School, JD

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office):  
Attorney/Nassau County Attorney

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

Executive Director, Center for the Community Interest; General Counsel, NY State Highway Division; VP, Douglass Civic Assn, Council candidate 2001

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES  NO

(Please note: Citizens Union can only grant its support to candidates we have interviewed. If you would like to be interviewed, please follow up with Citizens Union staff, as resources constrain us from interviewing every candidate.)

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES  NO

Signature of Candidate: Dennis J. Saffran Date: July 15, 2013

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

<p>1. What is your position with respect to eliminating party primaries and establishing a non-partisan election system in which all candidates and all voters participate in the first round and the top two candidates advance to the second round?</p>	<p>Support/Oppose  See Additional Comments</p>
<p>2. What is your position on instituting Instant Runoff Voting for all citywide offices and for all special elections for city offices? (Int. No. 1066)</p>	<p>Support/Oppose  See additional comments</p>
<p>3. What is your position on creating a voluntary municipal poll worker program to supplement poll worker recruitment by district leaders? (Int. No. 721)</p>	<p>Support/Oppose <u>Support</u></p>
<p>4. What is your position on requiring city agencies to report the number of applicants that they register to vote as required by current law (Int. No. 760)?</p>	<p>Support/Oppose <u>Oppose</u>  *See additional comments</p>
<p>5. What is your position on transmitting electronically voter registration information collected by city agencies to the Board of Elections in the City of New York?</p>	<p>Support/Oppose <u>Support</u></p>
<p>6. What is your position on requiring the Board of Elections to report performance metrics to the City Council that conform to the Mayor's Management Report? (Int. No. 778)</p>	<p>Support/Oppose <u>Support</u></p>
<p>7. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?</p>	<p>Support/Oppose <u>Support</u></p>
<p>8. What is your position on expanding the Voter Guide published by the Campaign Finance Board to cover all races occurring in New York City, such as state and federal contests, and providing the opportunity for voters to receive the guide electronically rather than in print form? (Int. No. 769)</p>	<p>Support/Oppose <u>Support</u>  *See additional comments</p>

**CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM**

9. What is your position on eliminating matching funds for contributions bundled by lobbying organizations or lobbyists?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
10. What is your position on banning placement agents from bundling contributions for any elected official who influences the selection of pension investors?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
11. What is your position on prohibiting participants in the city's campaign finance program from using public matching funds to purchase strategic campaign consulting services from firms that also provide lobbying services?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose

**CITY COUNCIL REFORM**

12. What is your position on creating a bill drafting service independent of the Speaker's Office, similar to the New York State Legislature's bill drafting commission?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
13. What is your position on the following proposals enabling Council committees to function more effectively and independently of the speaker :	
a. Should committee chairs have the ability to hire at least one committee staffer?	<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
d. Should the number of overall committees be reduced so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
14. What is your position on greater disclosure of councilmembers' outside income?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose <i>See Additional Comments</i>
15. What is your position on limiting stipends or "lulus" to only members holding majority or minority leadership positions?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
16. When the Quadrennial Compensation Commission is reconvened, what is your position on requiring that any future increase in councilmember compensation only apply prospectively to the following term?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose

17. What is your position on ensuring a more equitable and needs-based distribution of discretionary funding?	Support/Oppose <i>See Additional Comments</i>
18. What is your position on increasing transparency of discretionary funding by requiring the list of capital and expense funds and their sponsors be provided to councilmembers and the public three days in advance of any vote, and expanding the online searchable database of expense funds to include all capital fund recipients and applicants?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose

**PUBLIC SAFETY AND OVERSIGHT OF POLICE MISCONDUCT**

19. What is your position on reducing the frequency of stop, question and frisks by conducting stops more judiciously?	Support/ <u>Oppose</u> <sup>*</sup> <i>* See Additional Comments</i>
20. What is your position on establishing the Commission to Combat Police Corruption (CCPC) as a permanent commission in the City Charter while empowering the CCPC to issue subpoenas?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
21. What is your position on enhancing the Civilian Complaint Review Board's (CCRB) authority to initiate an investigation into reported or known incidents of police misconduct without receipt of a formal complaint?	Support/ <u>Oppose</u>
22. What is your position on granting the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) with the authority to prosecute officers found guilty of lying during CCRB investigations?	Support/ <u>Oppose</u> <sup>*</sup> <i>* See Additional Comments</i>
23. What is your position on reinstating the zero tolerance penalty for false official statements by public officers?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose

**BUDGET REFORM**

24. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for: a. the borough presidents?	Support/ <u>Oppose</u>
b. Conflicts of Interest Board?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
c. the public advocate ?	Support/ <u>Oppose</u>
d. community boards?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose
25. What is your position on making the budget process more transparent by clearly defining units of appropriation and limiting their size?	<u>Support</u> /Oppose



## Dennis Saffran, Additional Comments

Question 1. As a Republican I should support the proposal to eliminate party primaries and establish a non-partisan election system, as it would be likely to increase the number of Republicans, and moderate Democrats, on the Council. And, indeed, the prospect of greater ideological diversity among New York City officeholders is a major appeal of such a proposal. Nonetheless, I have serious qualms about it, and did not vote for the similar plan proposed by Mayor Bloomberg. The fact is that party identification does provide voters with important information about a candidate, and this can be especially true for a lower level office like City Council. Realistically, voters don't have time to focus on these elections like they do on elections for higher office, media coverage is of course minimal, and many of the issues discussed by the candidates are "valence issues" on which everyone agrees and it is thus impossible to draw meaningful distinctions between the candidates. (One issue in my district when I ran the last time was flooding. We were all against it.) Thus party identification is often the only meaningful information about a candidate that voters have. My concern is therefore that the unintentional result of this well-meaning reform would be that voters would be likely to cast less rather than more informed votes, or (having no basis to differentiate between candidates they have scarcely if ever heard of) would be less likely to vote at all.

Question 2. I have qualms about Instant Runoff Voting for somewhat similar reasons. My understanding is that ranked voting systems such as this have often dampened voter interest and turnout due to their complexity. By contrast, the present New York City runoff system, by focusing voter interest, has often resulted in the greatest voter engagement and participation in the process. (E.g., *Badillo v. Beame*, *Koch v. Cuomo*, *Holtzman v. Hevesi*, *Ferrer v. Green*.) Thus, again, my concern is that the unintentional result of such a reform would be a less informed and involved electorate.

Question 4. As you will note I support the other Board of Elections reform bills endorsed by Citizens Union, and I certainly support the current requirement of making voter registration forms available at city agencies and with city government forms. However, as someone who has spent most of my career in government, I do not support this bill which would require agencies to not merely distribute voter registration forms and transmit any completed in their offices to the Board of Elections, but also to pro-actively keep count of these forms and report this count to the Board. The Board described this bill as an "unfunded mandate" that would require it to prepare 145 individually coded versions of its voter registration form in five different languages for the 29 covered agencies. (New York City Council, Transcript of the Minutes of the Committee on Governmental Operations, October 15, 2012, *available at* <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=2209915&GUID=5768BC11-9716-4C18-8382-16C7B81ED859>, pp. 33-35). I am less concerned about the effect on the Board, however, than on the impact on the other agencies. Government agencies are inundated with such reporting requirements, which are often, as in this case, wholly unrelated to their core missions and thus divert them from these public service missions. The result is less effective and responsive government.

Question 8. I support the proposal to provide voters the opportunity to receive the Campaign Finance Board ("CFB") Voter Guide electronically rather than in print form. I support the proposal to extend publication of the Guide to cover state and federal elections with the important caveat, as

stated by the CFB (see October 15, 2012 Transcript [Question 4 above] pp. 184-87, that it must be accompanied by aggressive efforts to make the electronic option available to as many voters as possible. Otherwise, as the CFB notes, the cost of this expansion would be prohibitive – requiring them to publish four Guides for the three primaries and one general election during presidential election years, at a likely cost of double the \$8 million they will spend on the Guides for the one primary and the general election this year.

Question 14. I strongly support greater disclosure of councilmembers' outside income, both earned and unearned. In fact, in my recent financial disclosure filing with the Conflict of Interests Board I went beyond the legal requirements for candidates by including complete schedules of the actual values of all investments and investment income, rather than just disclosing these values in broad categories as permitted by the present toothless law. (See <http://www.scribd.com/doc/153495757/Financial-Disclosure-Release> {Press Release} and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/153481356/Conflict-of-Interest-Board-Financial-Disclosure> [Disclosure Report].) I would support revision of the law to require such detailed disclosure.

Question 17. I of course support a more “equitable” distribution of discretionary funding. However, as a resident and potential representative of a middle-class outer borough Council District that is often derided as “affluent” by members of the city’s elite who are, in fact, far more affluent than most of my neighbors, I do not support the proposals described by CU for a more “needs-based” distribution. As CU itself points out “the city budget process is largely controlled by the executive branch. City Council involvement in the budget process is often confined to the margins and seeks to address needs or gaps in funding for local communities. Discretionary funding has filled this void.” (*Creating a More Equitable and Objective Discretionary Funding Process in New York City*, May 2012, pp. 8, 39.) The quite appropriate consideration of “socioeconomic indicators” in apportioning the City budget that CU advocates is of course accounted for by nondiscretionary executive funding, including the social services budget and the police and fire budgets, which are disproportionately spent in poorer communities. Discretionary funding in a middle-class community like mine supports such things as Little Leagues and school enrichment programs that the strapped school system cannot afford because it appropriately prioritizes the needs of poorer students. Cutting these programs, as would result from linking discretionary funding to economic need, would drive the middle class out of the city, thus shrinking the tax base and resulting in fewer services for the poor.

I also note that I strongly support and would continue the Participatory Budgeting program in my district.

Question 19. Of course I support conducting police stops under the stop, question and frisk program more “judiciously,” which is defined as “having, exercising, or characterized by sound judgment.” However, I do not necessarily support “reducing the frequency” of these stops – and do not see this as synonymous with conducting them “more judiciously” – so long as there is reasonable suspicion for the stop. Of course these stops must be respectful and civil. But the bottom line is they get guns off the streets and save lives - typically the lives of poor and minority children.

Question 22. I oppose this on the understanding that lying to a government investigator is already a crime, even if the lie is not under oath and thus does not constitute perjury. (As I recall this is what Martha Stewart was convicted and jailed for.) Those who lie to government investigators are, quite properly, prosecuted by the prosecutorial authorities. However, they are not prosecuted by the very people they are charged with lying to because of the inherent conflict of interest. Of course, police officers who intentionally lie to the Civilian Complaint Review Board should be prosecuted. However, I would support this bill only if it were proven to me that prosecution by the District Attorney or other disinterested prosecutor was either legally impossible or in practice never happens.



## II. CANDIDATE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Citizens Union is adding a new element to its evaluation of candidates running for office. As a candidate who presently does not hold elected office, CU is interested in knowing your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position.

If elected, Citizens Union will use these promises to evaluate your performance while in office, as well as, to evaluate your candidacy in the future.

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

### TOP FIVE 2013 CAMPAIGN PROMISES

1. See Attached Sheet
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee  
via fax to 212.227.0345 or via email to [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)  
Call us at 212-227-0342 with any questions.

## **Dennis Saffran, Top Five Campaign Promises**

1. In the wake of the political scandal that has tarred both parties in Eastern Queens I will work to restore the bipartisan tradition of integrity in government set by my local political mentors, Republican Sen. Frank Padavan and Democratic Assemblywoman Nettie Mayersohn. I will do this by taking such steps as fully disclosing my finances and working to close loopholes in the current financial disclosure laws. (See Question 14.)
2. I will work to preserve and improve educational quality by fighting to maintain high standards and adequate funding in School Districts 25 and 26, and to defend the city's specialized high schools against the federal legal complaint that would water down merit selection and effectively impose a vile "Asian quota" on kids who work hard to get into these schools.
3. I will work to restricting overdevelopment that threatens our quality of life in Northeast Queens by supporting downzoning and fighting large commercial and residential projects that would drain our resources and change the character of our communities.
4. I will oppose the City Council bill to allow noncitizens to vote. I strongly support immigration but believe it is American citizenship that binds us together as a nation of immigrants and that this bill is an attack on the idea of citizenship.
5. I will work to continue the safe-streets policies of Mayors Bloomberg and Giuliani and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly that have kept our neighborhoods safe and turned our city around.