

Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates

Committee New York

City Council Elections 2017

Citizens Union appreciates your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing New York City and our interest in reforming city and state government. Please return the questionnaire to us as soon as possible, and no later than June 28th.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for the New York City Council, and to issue our preference for the Primary and endorsement for the General Election.

Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.

If you seek our support, we will also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process.

Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed. We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues.

We thank you very much for your response.

Biographical Information

Candidate Name: Ritchie Torres

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat

Age: 29

Education:

Office Sought (including district): Re-election to City Council 15

Occupation/Employer: City Council Member

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

(Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.)

Campaign Contact Information: friendsofritchietorres17@gmail.com

Campaign Manager Name:

Additional Staff Contact: Ashley Torres

Address:

Telephone: 347-698-0280

Fax:

Website:

Email: Ashley.torres813@gmail.com

Twitter:

Facebook:

Affirmations

Have you completed required campaign finance filings?

YES / NO

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee?

YES / NO

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites of being considered for Citizens Union endorsements.)

Signature of Candidate: 
Date: June 28, 2017

I. POLICY QUESTIONS

Please state whether you support or oppose the following reform measures, and feel free to elaborate in the space provided at the end or on additional paper.

VOTING AND ELECTIONS REFORM

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?

Support / Oppose

2. What is your position on instituting Instant Runoff Voting for all citywide offices and for all special elections for city offices?

Support / Oppose

3. What is your position on creating a voluntary municipal poll worker program to supplement poll worker recruitment by district leaders?

Support / Oppose

4. 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?

Support / Oppose

5. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?

Support / Oppose

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

6. 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?

Support / Oppose

7. What is your position on increasing the Campaign Finance Board's public matching grants from a partial match of 55% to a full match of funds raised (Int. 1130-A)?

Support / Oppose

CITY COUNCIL REFORM

8. How do you feel the reformed bill drafting process is going under the enacted 2014 Council Rules Reforms and do you think we need a more independent process similar to New York State Legislature's bill drafting commission?

The Council's bill drafting unit could benefit from a more independent process that allows for more transparency as to what Members own LS requests, speeds up the time for a bill to be drafted, and takes out the potential for favoritism as to what bills go to certain Members.

9. 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?

Support / Oppose

b. Should committee hearings and votes be scheduled at the direction of the chairs?

Support / Oppose

c. Should committees be able to issue subpoenas by a vote of their members?

Support / Oppose

d. Now that committee chair stipends have been eliminated what is your position on reducing the overall number of committees so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?

Support / Oppose

10. What is your position on greater disclosure of councilmembers' outside income?

Support / Oppose

11. 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?

Support / Oppose

12. What is your position on ensuring a more equitable and needs-based distribution of discretionary funding?

Support / Oppose

13. 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?

Support / Oppose

14. What is your position on extending term limits from two four-year terms to three four-year terms?

Support / **Oppose**

15. What is your position on making all actions designed to influence any City Council outcome, including the choice of Speaker, reportable as a lobbying expense?

Support / Oppose

PUBLIC SAFETY AND OVERSIGHT OF POLICE MISCONDUCT

16. 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?

Support / Oppose

17. 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 / Oppose

18. 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 / Oppose

19. What is your position on reinstating the zero tolerance penalty for false official statements by public officers?

Support / Oppose

20. What is your position on requiring the Police Commissioner to explain divergence from NYPD trial judge and CCRB disciplinary recommendations and to make the explanation public?

Support / Oppose

21. What is your position on requiring the NYPD to publish a regular report of use of force incidents with data disaggregated by race?

Support / Oppose

22. What is your position on granting the CCRB authority to prosecute officers who lie under oath during the course of their investigations?

Support / Oppose

BUDGET REFORM

23. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for:

a. the borough presidents?

Support / Oppose

b. Conflicts of Interest Board?

Support / Oppose

c. the public advocate?

Support / Oppose

d. community boards?

Support / Oppose

24. What is your position on making the budget process more transparent by clearly defining and limiting units of appropriation?

Support / Oppose

25. What is your position on release of revenue projections (other than property taxes) prior to Council hearings on the Executive budget?

Support / Oppose

LAND USE AND COMMUNITY BOARD REFORM

26. What is your position on designating urban planners for use by community boards and requiring borough president's report to the Council the manner in which they advertise and make community board appointments?

Support / Oppose

27. What is your position on establishing a formal standardized and transparent process for community board appointments including written applications, interviews of candidates, and filling vacancies within 30 days?

Support / Oppose

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

28. In November, voters in New York will be asked whether they wish to hold a constitutional convention to amend the New York State Constitution. What is your position on holding such a convention?

Support / **Oppose**

29. If you support the constitutional convention, what actions, if any, will you take to ensure that it takes place? If you oppose the convention, what will you do to defeat it?

I will stand with the elected officials and unions who have voiced concerns about the Constitutional Convention and remind those who are in support what is at risk. Constitutional Convention Delegates elections are based on State Senate district lines that have been gerrymandered at the expense of urban residents and communities of color. This would likely lead to conservative anti-tenant, anti-labor, anti-reform, anti-choice, pro-gun Republican Senators serving as delegates. We are in a fragile state as a State and as a Nation and we must protect our hard-fought victories in our Constitution rather than leaving it vulnerable to attack from outside spending from national conservative groups.

30. Last year, Citizens Union helped craft and push for the enactment of a law that placed political contribution limits and disclosure requirements on nonprofits that are formed by, or affiliated with, elected officials, which helped prevent some significant features of an emerging "pay-to-play" culture in New York City. Do you have any other ideas to further limit such a culture and create a better environment where contributions, either personal or political do not unduly influence the actions of elected officials?

I believe that the use of term limits and matching funds has gone a long way in creating more competitive districts made up of candidates from a variety of backgrounds and creates platforms for candidates whose fundraising bases, like mine in 2013, are amplified and whereby people in less wealthy districts are given a voice. We must ultimately lower contribution limits and create more transparency from PACs. It is imperative that we reign in the big money spent by wealthy real estate developers and Wall Street business interests on elections – particularly when they are shown time and again to benefit from the legislation passed by elected officials whose campaign they supported. I believe we should further limit what PACs can give to campaigns and more strictly follow the flow of

money from individual donors and businesses to PACs and the campaigns they are choosing to donate to.

Please use the space provided or a separate sheet of paper to elaborate on your positions on the issues contained in the previous pages. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

**II.
CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS
(PAST AND CURRENT)**

In addition to evaluating stances on the issues above, Citizens Union also assesses incumbents on how well they kept the promises made to voters during the previous election. As an elected official who is seeking re-election,

- what were the top five promises you made to your constituents when you ran for your current seat and what progress has been made in keeping those promises, and**
- what are the top five promises you are making to voters during this campaign?**

Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient, and to affix additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.

We thank you very much for your response.

**TOP FIVE
CAMPAIGN PROMISES
FROM LAST ELECTION AND ACTION ON THEM**

1. In my bid for City Council in 2013 I made affordable housing a major issue of my campaign. Growing up in NYCHA, I know the conditions that some residents have to live in and the fear that can keep them living in horrific conditions because they don't know where else they will go. While I have been a vocal proponent of more affordable housing and have worked closely with the Mayor to create more units I have also recently been working on legislation to address abuses in three-quarter housing where residents are trapped between a half-way house and being able to afford rent in the city. I sponsored a bill to address this atrocity and to address faster relocation for residents living in a dangerous home.

2. Another of my campaign promises was to make sure that we are providing good jobs for our residents. One of the ways I addressed this was with Council Member Brad Lander, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mayor De Blasio and a coalition of businesses and non-profits to launch HireNYC. This program expanded contract hiring by the city to include human service contracts and required contractors selling goods and services to post positions to Workforce1 Career Centers, the city hiring service. These expansions have been crucial in getting vulnerable populations into jobs that can help them escape poverty cycles and build skills to increase their economic mobility.

3. In my campaign commitments in 2013 I vowed to address funding oversight of public schools. While I have fought for more funding for public schools during my time as Council Member, I have also focused on research to address diversity and the rights of LGBTQ+ students. Given the vitriol over bathroom laws in public schools and, closer to home, the lack of diversity in our schools, I have been extremely outspoken on implementing reports on school diversity (or lack of) and protections for LGBTQ+ students to ensure students are not only in schools where they are given the tools to learn, but where they are also given an environment that they are comfortable to learn in.

4. In 2015, after committing to doing more for seniors in our community, I led the fight for funding the first LGBTQ+ senior center, S.A.G.E., in the Bronx. Many senior residents are already left feeling isolated in poor living conditions and without access to community centers, but this is particularly true in the LGBTQ+ senior community. Prior to this center, seniors had to travel into Manhattan if they wanted to spend time with members of their community. Now, the Bronx home represents one of the largest investments of support for LGBTQ+ elders that we have seen in New York.

5. As a life-long resident of the Bronx I have seen infrastructure projects fall apart when a politician or contractor got their money and didn't feel the need to finish. As of 2015 we had 660 active infrastructure projects and \$654 million in Minority and Women-Owned Business contracts. These projects have brought jobs and revitalization to the Bronx and have made contracts with the city more competitive among women and minorities.

TOP FIVE 2017 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. In light of the new administration and the many challenges we face, I plan to make immigration policies a top priority. My office is currently offering free counseling services and I know we will need to invest more funds to protect people from these horrific ICE raids and deportations.

2. I want to continue my work on increasing school diversity by desegregating our schools and investing in students and ways that we can end the segregation that we are seeing across New York City. We have allowed ourselves, in the most diverse city in the world, to have some of the highest levels of school segregation. This is unacceptable. My proposal to frame school segregation as a human rights issue has gained traction among advocacy groups and other elected officials, if this passes we will be able to address the issue of NYC segregation based not just on intent, where we see few schools intentionally segregating, but also provide insight on how this segregation impacts students.

3. Affordable housing and investing in new, majority affordable housing in the Bronx, will continue to be a main priority for me. As the product of affordable housing and a housing advocate for many years, I know this situation is not going to get better until we have more accountability from landlords and developers.

4. Recent news has exposed deep problems in our electoral process as we see problems with voter registrations and voter ID laws appearing across the state. I want to pursue new and creative avenues that will address voter rights in New York City and implement more active voter registration processes. I recently passed legislation that will remind people of their voting history and will hopefully encourage them to go out and vote.

5. Given many of the events of the last few years, I want to turn more attention to criminal justice reform and our prison systems and the ways that young people, like Kalief Browder, become caught in

a vicious cycle that is not meant to rehabilitate, but to proliferate and keep people trapped. We must close Riker's Island and invest more funding in rehabilitation and youth programs.

ETHICAL REPRESENTATION OF CONSTITUENTS

Citizens Union believes that all New Yorkers deserve to be represented by officials who work for the public interest and honor public trust. With the corruption conviction of recent state legislative leaders, we seek to endorse a candidate who will demonstrate that she/he will honor the full commitment of the oath of office, and will always represent the public interest above all else. Please tell us how you have and would continue to conduct the political affairs of this office in an upright manner, and restore the public trust in your district.

I began my work in politics not as a lawyer, or a politician, but as a college dropout who wanted to help people in my community. I did this through tenant organizing and working in Jimmy Vacca's office to document resident complaints and fight back against abusive landlords and make sure people were able to keep their homes. Growing up poor in the outer boroughs often means you are treated as collateral damage from corrupt dealings among politicians and contractors. When I was elected in 2013, and even before that when I decided to run for office, I vowed to never be the politician that sold out my constituents for a quick dollar or for more political influence. My dealings in the City Council have always been conducted ethically and with the utmost honesty and integrity and I am incredibly proud of my work with incredible coalitions of elected officials, activists, businesses and non-profits to help the most vulnerable residents of NYC.