



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: Vanessa Aronson
 Party Affiliation(s): Democratic Age: 32
 Education: MPP, Harvard Kennedy School of Government; MA Relay Graduate School of Education;
 Office Sought (including district): City Council District 4 BA, University of Chicago
 Occupation/Employer: Full time candidate

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: 6th and 7th grade Math and Science Teacher, MS319, NYC Dept of Education; Foreign Service Officer, U.S. Department of State: Economic Officer to the UN, Press and Cultural Attache at U.S. Consulate General Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Press Associate, U.S. Embassy Jakarta Indonesia.
(Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.)

Campaign Contact Information

Campaign Manager Name: Julian Phillippi Additional Staff Contact:
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 Website: www.vanessataronson.com Email: info@vanessataronson.com
 Twitter: @VanessaAronson Facebook: Vanessa T Aronson

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.)

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?

Although some Council Members say that the drafting process has sped up since the 2014 Council Rules Reform was enacted, there hasn't yet been the necessary overhaul of the legislative process to make the process more independent, because most of the drafting is still handled by counsels representing different communities. While this reform was a step in the right direction, I do think we still need a more independent process.

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 requiring the NYPD to publish a regular report of use of force incidents with data disaggregated by race?	✓ Support / Oppose
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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
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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 want to begin by saying that I wholeheartedly support Citizens Union's guiding principles for reform within a State Constitutional Convention. I commend Citizens Union for embarking on such a positive and optimistic campaign to bring civic-minded New Yorkers together in coalition to affect positive change. New Yorkers deserve reform like fairer elections, increased accountability, decreased corruption, and better run education, healthcare and economic systems.

However, in the current divisive political climate in our state (and across our country), the risks to the currently codified protections to the fundamental rights outlined in our state constitution, as well as the estimated cost of a constitutional convention, make me hesitant to support the convention at this time. I worry that those most staunchly supporting the convention are more in favor of dividing our state, instead of uniting it, as Citizens Union hopes to achieve. If the convention passes in November, I will work with Citizens Union to simplify voting for delegates, eliminate double dipping by state legislators, and require publication of voter information on pamphlets--as these are really important initiatives.

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 New York City is in a position where we should be seriously discussing what a fully publicly-funded campaign finance program, with strict spending and reporting guidelines, would look like. While the cost and oversight of such a program is often barrier for most cities, New York already provides millions of dollars to candidates and supports a robust Campaign Finance Board who oversees the administration of public funds and the tracking of expenses. However, robust and multiple mechanisms would need to be created to ensure candidates receiving funds serious, viable candidates.

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.

Unfortunately, the current political climate in New York is quite divisive and partisan. I worry that eliminating party primaries in this environment would result in narrowing the field of perspectives that could have a viable shot at winning an election. For example, in my race there are currently nine candidates running as democrats. I strongly believe that a larger pool of candidates gives the community and the voters more options, more perspectives to choose from, and will ultimately result in the strongest candidate moving forward to the general election. At the same time, there are currently two candidates running as republicans. If we were to eliminate the party primary, and allow the top two vote-getters to advance to the general election, I doubt that candidates would actually shed their party identity in this current divisive political climate. Instead, the democrats would be at a disadvantage if they had too many candidates carrying this label and would discourage many contender. Therefore the community and voters would have fewer options.

Council committee chairs should have more discretion to function independently of the Speaker. This should include scheduling hearings, issuing subpoenas (upon vote of majority of members), and hiring staff. One of the most important functions of the City Council is the oversight power that it has, and the committees should be empowered to effectively enact this.

I believe that a representative government should not be made up of career politicians, but citizens with diverse experiences and community service. I believe that term limits allow for new voices and perspectives to be brought into the Council.

II. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS

As a candidate who presently does not hold elected office, what are 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.

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 2017 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. I will work to make New York more affordable, supporting tenants and small businesses. I will publicly advocate for the repeal of the Urstadt Law, preserve current affordable housing stocks, including rent-controlled and rent-stabilized units, to the full extent provided by current law, and support the creation of additional affordable housing stocks by working with non-profit and other developers who will make affordable housing a priority.

2. I will focus on fiscal responsibility and in the face of federal cuts, I will protect public funding for housing, schools and healthcare. Federal spending cuts are on the horizon. Now, more than ever, we need careful budgeting and long term financial planning to protect our city.

3. I will ensure bicyclists, vehicles, and pedestrians safely share our streets and hold the MTA accountable for improving services for all, including people with disabilities. New York needs safe and dependable service, clean stations, and access for all our residents and visitors, including people with disabilities.

4. As a former teacher, I will be a strong advocate for all students, including those with special needs, and the hardworking teachers across our city.

5. I will push the Council to enact ethics reforms, including more restrictions on city lobbyists. City Hall should be open to all New Yorkers, not just special interests.

III. 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 chose to pursue a career in public service because I believe in the government and its role in helping people, especially the most vulnerable in our community. I was a child with mobility issues and after the sudden death of my father when I was nine years old, my family's income dipped below the poverty line. The government helped me and my family get back on our feet, and I made a promise to myself to ensure that the government continues to be a dependable safety net for others.

As a commissioned Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State, I took an oath to support and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

In this capacity, I served in countries with governments very different from the U.S., Indonesia and Vietnam. When I was assigned to work on agriculture hunger issues at the United Nations, I worked to bring food and nutritional support to failed and hostile states like Somalia and North Korea.

When I left the Foreign Service and moved back to New York, I became a public school teacher at a low-income school, where I saw the tangible impacts that waste, mismanagement, and corruption across various government agencies can have on our youngest and most-vulnerable New Yorkers.

These experiences inform my perspective of the sacred role of a public official and the utmost importance of holding the political affairs of this office in our unique city in this remarkable country to the absolute highest standard. To me, running for office is not about popularity and political favors or connections. It is a privilege and a responsibility to listen to the needs of my community and deliver to my constituents the fair, transparent, inclusive governance they deserve.

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007
Via email to candidates@citizensunion.org or fax to 212.227.0345 • Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions.