

**Candidate Questionnaire Local Candidates Committee NYC Public Advocate  
Special Election 2019**

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 January 3<sup>rd</sup>.** Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for New York City Public Advocate, and to issue our endorsement in the Special 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 publish returned questionnaires on our website, in printed voters directory, and in other appropriate venues. We thank you very much for your response.

**Biographical Information**

Candidate Name: Dawn L. Smalls

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat

Age: 41

Education: BA, Boston University; JD, Stanford Law School

Office Sought: New York City Public Advocate

Occupation/Employer: Partner, Boies, Schiller Flexner

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

- Clinton Administration - Asst, White House Chief of Staff
- Dept. of Health and Human Services (Obama Administration) - Executive Secretary
- Hillary Clinton for President - 2008 Regional Political Director
- Barack Obama for President 2008 New York Political Director
- Commissioner on Joint Committee for Public Ethics (appointed by Andrea Stewart Cousins)
- Ford Foundation - Director, Democratic Participation
- Open Society - Program Officer, Civic Engagement and Political Reform
- American Constitution Society, National Board Member

- Secretary; NYC Bar Association, Government Ethics Committee (under then Chair, Senator Kristen Gillibrand).

Candidate Cell Phone: 917-406-9977

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

### **Campaign Contact Information**

Campaign Manager Name: Casey Petrashek

Additional Staff Contact: Sara Lind; Jordan Jayson

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Telephone: 646-716-1747

Fax:

Website: dawnfornewyork.com

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### **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's endorsement.)

Signature of Candidate:



Date: 12/31/18

## **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.

### **CITIZEN UNION ISSUES**

1. What is your position with respect to eliminating party primaries and establishing a nonpartisan election system in which all candidates participate in the first round and the top two candidates advance to the second round? All registered voters regardless of party would be eligible to vote in both rounds. Support / **Oppose**

**I do not support 'jungle' primaries where in a state like New York two Democrats will likely end up running against each other in the first round and then again in a second round. I do support reforms to ensure that voters can register for their party of preference much closer to the election than is allowed under current law.**

2. What is your position on instituting ranked choice voting in all elections for citywide office, including all special elections? **Support** / Oppose

3. 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

**If a law was established by the voters, it should only be modified by the voters, as a matter of good governance.**

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

- a. borough presidents? **Support** / Oppose
- b. The Conflicts of Interest Board? **Support** / Oppose
- c. The Public Advocate? **Support** / Oppose
- d. community boards? **Support** / Oppose

#### **ISSUES OF CITYWIDE IMPORTANCE**

5. How would you use the office of the Public Advocate to impact public policy to serve the broad public interest?

**I plan to focus the office of Public Advocate on a few key issues that impact New Yorkers and put dedicated teams in charge of tracking progress, calling out failures and proposing solutions day in and day out until these problems are fixed.**

- 1. The MTA - buses and subways are the heartbeat of this city. If public transit doesn't work, the city doesn't work. As Public Advocate I would make it my job to speak to any and all officials who impact the progress of our transportation system - including the Governor in Albany and federal agencies in DC that can provide resources and funding.**
- 2. Housing and Homelessness - There are more homeless children under 6 than single men, NYCHA's unlivable conditions are a proven health hazard, and 'affordable housing' is not affordable for typical working class families who are being forced out of the neighborhoods that their families have been building for generations. As Public Advocate I would hold landlords and developers accountable for safe, affordable living conditions and I would prioritize finding long-term, stable homes for women and children who are currently shuttled from shelter to shelter.**
- 3. Voting Reforms - New York City is often heralded as one of the most progressive cities in the world, yet we are woefully behind providing New Yorkers a modern-day voting system. I support early voting, automatic registration, no-excuse absentee ballots, consolidation of primary elections, instant runoff and ranked choice voting, and making sure our technology**

**works so that people are not stuck at the polls for hours on end due to broken machines.**

6. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as Public Advocate?

**My most important legislative priorities are:**

- 1. Homelessness: Ensure women and children living in shelters be given preference to be placed in permanent housing, for instance, when new affordable housing lotteries take place.**
- 2. Education: Advocate for the rights of homeless families under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to bring more training and support for school staff on how to best support homeless students and require stronger coordination between the Departments of Mental Health, Housing and Education to leverage funds for students impacted by homelessness.**
- 3. Housing: Expand the TPT program to include landlords who fail to maintain their buildings and eliminate vacancy decontrol.**
- 4. Infrastructure: Require developers to contribute to infrastructure in the neighborhoods where they build: street repairs, contribute to needed MTA infrastructure, schools, parks, etc.**
- 5. Voting Reforms: Enact voting reforms like automatic voter registration, early voting, no-excuse absentee ballots, consolidation of primary elections and instant-runoff/ranked choice voting to NYC.**

**My most important non-legislative priority is:**

- 1. Roll out 'fair fares' to all 800,000 low-income people advocates say should be eligible, expand the program to single-ride Metrocards favored by low-income individuals and ensure that the mayor fully funds the program.**
- 2. Given my background in philanthropy, I'd like to leverage the fund for public advocacy to find and fund innovative solutions to my core platform issues. For instance, with the controversy over Amazon selecting Long Island City as a site for HQ - I would propose Jeff Bezos dedicate 10% or \$200 million of his Day One Fund (which supports the homeless and high quality pre-schools in low income communities) to New York City to fund resources for homeless women and children.**

7. What do you consider to be the three most important oversight functions of the Public Advocate?

1. **Work with any official who impacts services for New Yorkers to make sure they have a government that works to serve them - even if it means going beyond city officials, be it the Governor in Albany or Federal Agencies in DC. If the Mayor can go to Paris, the Public Advocate can go to Albany.**
2. **Be an independent watchdog over the Mayor, the Governor, elected officials and government executives at city agencies to ensure they are bringing New Yorkers the services they deserve. . proactively keeping New Yorkers informed of the progress for key policy objectives and the performance of key agencies.**
3. **Review developer commitments to the city to build affordable housing and hold them accountable to what they promised when seeking approval.**

8. The most recent Public Advocate has used litigation extensively, with mixed results, at least with regard to the Public Advocate's standing to bring a lawsuit. What is your view on the Public Advocate's use of litigation to attempt to force policy changes?

**Litigation is a key component to the role of Public Advocate. I believe it is important that the Public Advocate be an experienced attorney in order to pursue the full power of the office on behalf of New Yorkers.**

9. What discrepancies, if any, do you see between services promised to New Yorkers and services rendered? For those listed please indicate your proposals for bringing policy closer to practice.

**As I referenced earlier, my key platform issues have left many New Yorkers in an impossible situation.**

**MTA: Without public transportation, upward mobility for New Yorkers stops if they cannot go to work, school - or anyplace else that helps them live a quality life. I would advocate for expanded bus services so that people can still get around as fixes are made to the subway, 'fair fares' so that people can afford to get where they need to go, and increased accessibility for people with disabilities.**

**Housing and Homelessness: I believe suitable housing is a human right. NYCHA has failed its tenants, landlords have taken advantage of renters - forcing them out of their homes - and women and children are being shuttled from shelter to shelter. I would prioritize long-term living for women and children who need stable homes, hold developers accountable to make sure they are providing affordable units and contributing to the community infrastructure, and advocate for tenants rights against predatory landlords.**

**Voting Reforms: I believe New Yorkers deserve an up to date voting system powered by the latest cutting edge technology and rooted in the most progressive values. This means enacting voting reforms like automatic voter registration, early voting, no-excuse absentee ballots, consolidation of primary elections and instant-runoff/ranked choice voting to NYC and holding officials accountable for corrupt or unethical behavior.**

10. How would you approach the responsibilities of the Public Advocate regarding access to public information in monitoring the implementation of the city's Open Data Law?

**There are two ways the Public Advocate can help shepherd the city's Open Data Law:**

- 1. In order for the law to benefit New Yorkers, they need to know it exists and use it. I would support expanding the PSA style storytelling campaign that is currently active on Link Kiosks showing how everyday New Yorkers use the data for things like bringing transparency to the rental market and using data points for environmental planning. The more city residents who see value in the data - and use it - the more pressure it will apply to agencies who have not kept up with providing information.**
- 2. Given that there aren't necessarily strong compliance standards under the current law, the Public Advocate has a responsibility to shine a light on agencies that are not providing updated information in a timely manner. The Public Advocate should publish an annual list of best and worst agencies sharing information under the city's Open Data Law. Additionally, information can be published on the most creative uses of the data to help encourage more sharing of information.**

11. What specifically will you do as Public Advocate to ensure New York achieves a full and complete Census count in 2020?

**It is imperative to me that NY get a full and accurate Census count in 2020 as we have 2 Congressional seats at stake and there is federal funding on the line that we need to address our infrastructure - among other key issues. As Public Advocate, I will give my full support to the NYAG and ACLU lawsuits challenging the citizenship question. As an attorney, I have fought for undocumented citizens in the past - and as the Public Advocate of a sanctuary city I will fight to make sure everyone is accounted for while protecting their civil rights.**

**Additionally we must urge the Governor and State Legislature to provide the funding necessary for community groups to get out the count - especially in the hardest to count areas where trust of community leaders is needed due to cultural or language barriers.**

12. How would you leverage the office of Public Advocate to address any of the following issues, if not discussed in answering previous questions: a. Affordable Housing b. Public Safety c. Public Transportation d. Health and Environment e. Economic Development f. Education

**Health:**

**Having served as Executive Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services during the initial implementation of the ACA under the Obama Administration, it is important to me that healthcare continue to advance towards universal coverage. As Public Advocate, I'd like to see protections put in place so that income is not the determining factor in a life or death situation. Healthcare is a human right, and lower income families and individuals are too often being denied that right. Specifically, I'd advocate for a moratorium on hospital closures. We cannot allow 'health deserts' to exist as services disappear in low-income communities. People don't just need access to coverage – but also access to nearby facilities with the services necessary to treat them. In emergency situations, travel time could mean the difference between life and death. It is important that each community have access to proper services within a reasonable distance to ensure a fair and just healthcare system.**

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**

What are the top five promises or goals you are making to voters during this campaign? 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. Fix The MTA**
- 2. Improve living solutions for homeless women and children**
- 3. Increase affordable housing solutions that keep families in stable homes**
- 4. Enact Modern Day Voting Reforms for NYC**
- 5. Confront and help facilitate a workable plan to repair and stabilize NYCHA housing.**

## **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 would continue to conduct the political affairs of this office in an upright manner.

**As a Commissioner on the Joint Committee for Public Ethics for the past three and half years, I was charged with oversight over lobbyists, the Governor and statewide elected officials. I was widely respected by my colleague**

**Commissioners and JCOPE staff for my counsel and votes for investigations against Democrats and Republicans. I think there is nothing more sacred than the public trust and have sought to operate with complete unassailable integrity in every position I have held. Further, as an attorney, I have taken an oath to uphold the law. As a first time candidate I am completely independent from the local political structure putting me in the unique position to hold the powers that be accountable. These are some of a number of reasons why I am uniquely situated and qualified for this office. I am politically sophisticated, having been deeply immersed in national politics over two decades, but without ties to the Mayor or the Governor or much of the City Council. Given that, I will work with them cooperatively when they are doing something right, and call them out when they are not.**

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700  
New York, NY 10007; Via email to [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org) or fax to 212-227-0345  
• Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions.