

Candidate Name: **Nomiki Konst**

Party Affiliation(s): **Democrat - although this is a nonpartisan election; I will not be seeking any party's endorsement, or financial support. I believe that to be in violation of the rules.**

Age: 34

Education: **University of Arizona**

Office Sought: **New York City Public Advocate**

Occupation/Employer: **Journalist**

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: **National Surrogate for Bernie Sanders 2016, Commissioner, DNC Unity Reform Commission. DNC Platform Committee Member. National Co-chair Barack Obama 2012. Former DNC member.**

Candidate Cell Phone: *(Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statemen*

**347-753-3634**

### **Campaign Contact Information**

Campaign Manager Name: Additional Staff Contact: **Moumita Ahmed**

Address: **31-09 Newtown Ave, Astoria, NY 11102**

Telephone: Fax:

Website: [www.NomikiKonst.com](http://www.NomikiKonst.com) Email: [moumita@nomikikonst.com](mailto:moumita@nomikikonst.com)

Twitter: **@NomikiKonst** Facebook: **@NomikiKonst**

### **Affirmations**

Have you completed required campaign finance filings? **YES / NO (First filing due January 11, but "filed with CFB and BOE)**

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: **Nomiki D. Konst**

Date: **1/11/2019**

### **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 believe in open primaries and ranked choice voting. I was a member of the Democratic Unity Reform Commission in which we investigated how to make the Democratic Party more inclusive, democratic, and engaged. New York State's voter engagement within the Democratic Party is the worst in the country, and it ranks just above Louisiana for second to last place nationally for turnout - and that is directly a result of having the most closed primaries. Furthermore, in a city controlled by Democrats who have high turnover of elected officials leading to special elections, it is outrageous and frankly corrupt that Tammany Hall style county committees are determining who our Congress members are. The people of New York - most of whom are progressive and reform minded - deserve to choose who their representatives are. Our registration deadlines are confusing, too far in advance, and voting is just too difficult if you want to vote in the democratic primary. We need to modernize our voting process. Registered Independents are the largest voting bloc in the country and in the State. Disenfranchising registered voters because they are not aligned with a private party in a one-party city is a form of corruption, in my opinion. I think it's fair to say that most people who register as Independents do so because they don't trust political institutions. I don't think registered Independents should be punished for that.**

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

Support.

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

I would support.

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

a. borough presidents? b. The Conflicts of Interest Board? c. The Public Advocate? d. community boards?

I believe in establishing independent budgeting for all of the above.

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

I believe the office of the Public Advocate must be reimagined as a reform-minded, investigative, highly visible anti-corruption watchdog instead of another political stepping stone to higher office. I believe the next Public Advocate can provide a check on a political system that has become beholden to interests which are further entrenching the inequality and discrimination that is slowly erasing New York and its residents.

While I don't believe the next Public Advocate should have a reflexively adversarial relationship with city and state officials, I do believe that she must view the office primarily through the lens of accountability promotion, forcing transparency on politicians and acting as a direct representative of communities that are being failed by the city's elected officials.

I envision the Public Advocate to be New York's lead activist and organizer of city residents. The next Public Advocate cannot advocate for the public behind closed doors. Public engagement will perhaps be the most important tool I will wield to not only communicate my efforts, but to implement and enact them. Drawing on my background as an activist, my instincts will naturally be to organize constituents and grassroots activists through online media and petitioning, turning the Public Advocate's office into a civic engagement hub where New Yorkers can collaborate to limit the power of special interests in NYC and put city government in the hands of citizens.

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

Broadly speaking, my priorities will be inequality, affordability, and the systemic political reform that is required in order to address those issues. My immediate priorities upon taking office would be to create a new, stronger system of local accountability for New Yorkers by deputizing a Public Advocate in every neighborhood; to go after local tax abatements; and to

begin the push for a \$30/hr minimum wage, starting with city workers and any companies receiving tax incentives.

Additionally, I would make it a top priority to reform the Public Advocate's office into a truly independent office. I will advocate for a charter revision to separate the power of the Public Advocate from politics -- no longer in the line of succession to the mayor and barring any elected official from running for the office for five years -- while also making the budget truly independent and expanded and calling for the DOI to be housed within the PA's office, preventing political firings or appointments.

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

1. Political corruption and the influence of political donations and special interests on city government
2. Agency transparency, performance and failure reporting (e.g., NYCHA's closed door meetings over lead poisonings)
3. Municipal pension boards -- ensuring responsible stewardship of municipal worker retirements while also enforcing socially responsible investments that reflect the city's values and public interest goals

**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 will certainly be one powerful tool I will reserve the right to exercise as Public Advocate, and in the instances that litigation is used to force policy changes, I would do so by hiring the best possible counsel with the experience and track record of litigating the types of cases that a Public Advocate should bring. But the role of the Public Advocate should be seen as much broader than as simply a litigator, and I believe it's far more important for the Public Advocate to see the office as a more expansive investigatory and oversight role, with litigation being one part of that public interest framework. Just as crucial will be the Public Advocate's subpoena power, and I will also advocate for the Department of Investigations to be housed within the Public Advocate's office where I believe it belongs.

**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.**

The two most extreme examples would be housing and transportation.

New York's housing crisis is a result of city government's abdication of its duty to fund and support affordable housing, instead leaving the issue to private market forces and a systematic yielding to real estate lobby influence. Housing must be treated as a human right.

I will push for the renewal and expansion of rent regulation laws, with the ultimate goal of implementing universal rent control. The true solution to our affordability crisis lies in rent control, tenant protections, and more public housing.

The most extreme example of city government's failure to serve the city in terms of housing is NYCHA, where we now have a public safety and health crisis. The City Council either purposefully ignored or were ignorant to a coverup by NYCHA in lead poisoning and racial discrimination. NYCHA violated open meetings laws by conducting closed door meetings in which they hired a law firm from outside NY state to willfully strategize a coverup of the NYCHA crises. It shouldn't take an ambitious reporter to notice our agencies are not complying with the most basic rules. With one out of eight New Yorkers living in NYCHA, we need an independent investigation. Furthermore, we should set mandatory attendance for all Housing committee chairs — with one allowed emergency exception — or otherwise face a fine or losing their chair's seat.

With regard to transportation, I support fully funding the MTA by taxing the wealthiest in our city, as well as the developers and corporations who have been incentivized to set up shop in NYC. No amount of cosmetic changes, 2nd avenue subway development or snappy ads will convince New Yorkers that the MTA is not being funded to deal with the crisis. I would not only push for full funding and a better tax structure, I would push to expand the fair fares program and ultimately push towards elimination of fares for NYC residents, within 5 years.

I would further use the power of the Public Advocate's media to educate New Yorkers on the cost of a delayed public transportation. How many jobs are lost when people are continuously late to work? How much money does the city lose? How many parents have to deal with childcare issues when the trains or buses aren't running on time or at all? There are real life consequences that ultimately make NYC weaker.

### **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?**

As Public Advocate I would consider it a top priority to make sure New York City's Open Data program continues to be the strongest in the country and to act as a watchdog for city agency compliance. I also plan to implement an Investigative Unit initiative that will train a team of volunteer citizen journalists to analyze mayoral and city agency data that will be available through the city's Open Data law. I would seek to expand the amount of agency data published on its Open Data portal, and provide citizen journalists with the tools needed to hold mayoral and city agencies accountable.

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

As Public Advocate I plan to be on the front lines in the fight against including a citizenship status question to the 2020 census, which could severely impact the accuracy of the census and jeopardize crucial funding and our Democratic representation in government. I also believe the Public Advocate should act as a liaison between city government and community organizations and nonprofits who will be vital partners in publicizing the count and reaching hard-to-count groups.

**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**

**Public Safety:**

As Public Advocate, one of my top priorities in terms of public safety will be to reestablish faith in law enforcement and increase community trust by taking a new approach to police misconduct. I am calling for an overhaul of the CCRB's processes for recommending discipline, which is currently far too lenient on police officers who have engaged in misconduct. It has adopted an unacceptable practice of recommending training instead of serious discipline in far too many cases, which does little to deter police misconduct. The Public Advocate must also actively highlight and publicize specific instances of misconduct when they occur, and call on the CCRB, NYPD, Mayor, and City Council to be held accountable.

**Health and Environment:**

Despite the rapid growth of the renewable energy sector, less than 4% of New York's electricity came from solar, wind, tidal or geothermal energy in 2016. And despite banning fracking in 2015, imports of fracked natural gas from Pennsylvania have doubled. To get to 100% renewable energy by 2030 — which is essential — we need to increase our onshore and offshore wind electricity to 25%, increase solar power to 30%, and reduce electricity use by 45%. I support imposing penalties on the use of imported fracked gas, while promoting the municipalization (public ownership) of a new renewable-focused energy system.

As Public Advocate, I will fight hard to make green roofs available to any building that can host one — not just new buildings — giving all New Yorkers the social-emotional benefits of increased recreational space, in addition to reducing the city's carbon footprint. I will also make sure that all of our schools, libraries, hospitals and post offices are fast-tracked for green roofs as well.

Additionally, we need to refocus our city's composting program so that more citizens and businesses understand how to participate — turning our food waste into a healthy soil

supplement for our community gardens and local farms. We have a role to play in one of the most exciting strategies to combat climate change: regenerative agriculture, which has the potential to sequester carbon back into the soil — especially if it's enriched with our organic compost.

Mass transit is predicted to decline from 36% to 21%. However, if use of public transit increases to 40% by 2050, CO2 emissions will be reduced by 6.6 gigatons. We become a healthier city by investing in a fully functioning mass transit.

In addition to my commitment to being a leader in pushing for New York City emissions reductions, one of my primary environmental focuses will be on healthy housing for New Yorkers. The affordable housing crisis in New York is forcing families into low-quality housing where landlords are failing to uphold standards of safety with regard to issues like mold, lead, and pests, causing a dramatic rise in asthma and developmental disorders that are outpacing national rates. Recent revelations of NYCHA's willful negligence and cover up of lead levels is a moral disaster and must be one of the primary campaigns waged by the next Public Advocate. Crumbling homes, toxic lead dust, and mold-triggered asthma are threatening the lives of 400,000 New Yorkers living in public housing. Our next public advocate must be on the front lines as a watchdog, leading investigations into NYCHA and forcing transparency on its resource allocations.

#### Economic Development:

A primary focus for economic development will be real estate. The city has been too focused on protecting developers and investors by giving out tax incentives rather than protecting local, community businesses in NYC. The real estate industry's chokehold on city government and our elected leaders has created a retail vacancy crisis that has caused a rash of empty storefronts, turning our city into what some call a "rich ghost town." Foreign oligarchs who are buying up our city and leaving apartments vacant, should no longer get off tax free. NYC apartments should not be personal Cayman Islands — especially since their purchases drive up the cost of neighboring real estate, rents and cost of living.

In broader terms, the most impactful thing a Public Advocate could do with regard to economic development is to focus on combatting the city's historic level of inequality. Inequality is tearing the social, cultural, commercial, and political fabric of New York City. Extreme wealth in the hands of a few and deference to corporate and foreign investment is turning our city into a rich ghost town. Big developers and tax-dodging investors are taking the land of working New Yorkers, driving up the costs of living in the community while not paying taxes. The infrastructure of our city is a wreck and the majority of New Yorkers struggling to live in this city already are dealing with rising costs of broken transportation, the price of delays and disarray and the crises of housing and small businesses.

The central message of my campaign is that our political leaders have failed to recognize that a thriving working and middle class is what allows a city's institutions — public, commercial, and cultural — to thrive. New York City is a wealthy city, but that wealth is not being spread evenly.

For the next Public Advocate, combatting inequality must be at the heart of her economic development agenda.

#### Education:

We have a serious design flaw in how we fund our public schools. No American should have a better education because of the block they live on. Because of state leadership and the charter school lobby, New York State has not fully funded our public schools - and give students of all backgrounds proper education, as promised constitutionally. Too many districts, with a high percentage being made up of low-income students of color, have yet to receive the \$4 billion they are owed by the state. With a new Democratic Senate, I will use the power of the Public Advocate's office to pressure our NYC lawmakers in Albany to fulfill the promise of full educational funding.

We must also end the school-to-prison pipeline. We need to end the criminalization of our schools. Police don't belong in schools. At the heart of this problem are two things: cruel policies that force children to come into contact with the law for issues that can be dealt with through other disciplinary measures, and the underfunding of schools in low-income communities. Both issues disproportionately affect immigrant and children of color, and we must change them to end the school-to-prison pipeline.