

2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

Candidate for BOROUGH PRESIDENT OF QUEENS
(Borough President, City Council, Comptroller, District Attorney, Mayor, Public Advocate,)

City Council District: _____

Borough: _____

Name: MARC CRAWFORD LEAVITT

Campaign Address: Mail: goes to PO Box 4300. Sunnyside, NY 11104, but the
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Political Party Affiliation: Democrat

Occupation: Attorney, and counsel pro bono to Sunnyside Community Services

Current Employment / Employer: Partner of Leavitt, Kerson & Duane, attorneys.

Are you an incumbent: Yes _____ No X Number of years in office NA

Under the current term limits law, how many more additional terms, after this one, will you be able to
serve? NA

Education:

High School: Music & Art, '66

College: SUNY Stony Brook, 'BA cum laude '70

Graduate / Professional: Columbia University Law School, '74

1. I received support to pay for college from:
(Please check all that apply)

Pell Grant

NYS Tuition Assistance Program

Scholarship

Student Loans

X Family

X Self (part-time jobs during college)

X Other Source: NYS Regents Scholarship

2. In my view, paying for public higher education (CUNY) should primarily be the responsibility of:
(check only one)

Students

Parents / Family

- X Government
- Employers
- All of the above

(Please attach additional sheets as necessary to answer the following questions.)

3. Public funding to public higher education has fallen sharply over the last two decades. Since 1991, NY State funding per student for CUNY senior colleges fell 14% and, for CUNY community colleges, it fell by 25.6%.¹ Though NY City began to restore funding to CUNY community colleges five years ago, proposed budget cuts this year will eliminate this advance. What would you do to increase public investment in CUNY?

CUNY senior and community colleges should be fully funded. It was a mistake to move away from the free education system decades ago (that benefited past generations of people who could not afford private colleges). Public higher education should be free just like grade school and high school. Our public education system is the foundation of a democratic society, To reduce funding is penny wise and pound foolish.

4. More than 50% of CUNY students come from households with annual income below \$40,000, but students will pay 15% more on average next year to attend a CUNY senior college and 14% more to attend a community college if tuition hikes go through. Overall, student tuition makes up 40% of CUNY's total operating revenue and the CUNY Master Plan ("CUNY Compact") calls for regular, annual tuition hikes.

4a. Do you support or oppose the current tuition increases?
Oppose.

4b. Do you support or oppose the CUNY Compact's call for annual tuition increases?
Oppose.

4c. What would you do to relieve the burden on students and families to pay for CUNY?
Support revised budget priorities to recognize that an educated workforce is better equipped for the jobs in this global society, and hence produces taxpaying members of society.

4d. Some economists argue that earning a college degree enables a student to get a good-paying job upon graduation, and, therefore, government policy should be structured around an expectation of students to finance their education by taking out loans. Do you agree or disagree with a higher education financing policy that is structured around students taking out loans to finance tuition increases? Why or why not?

As stated above, public higher education should be fully funded. To place heavy burdens on students and families is counterproductive for a healthy society and creates extra levels of stress for students and families.

5. CUNY enrollments are higher than at any other time in its history, but in 1975 (the last enrollment peak), CUNY had 11,500 full-time faculty and now it has 6,800. Similarly, there has been a decline in the number of professional and support staff. CUNY now has 9,000 adjunct faculty and 1,000 adjunct professional staff who are part-time and low-paid. The dramatic decline of the full-time workforce and reliance on an exploited and over-stretched part-time workforce compromises the quality of education and the University's ability to deliver educational services to students.

¹ Fiscal Policy Institute Report: "New York State's Underinvestment in Public Higher Education," January 15, 2009

5a. What specific policies would you advocate to provide CUNY with the resources to hire more full-time faculty, counselors, professional and other staff?

Support revised budget priorities.

5b. What specific policies would you advocate to improve the wages and working conditions of part-time adjunct faculty and staff that currently provide half the instruction at CUNY?

Part time employees should receive the same benefits as full time staff, in proportion.

6. What are your views on New York City's current tax structure? If you are elected, what specific tax and revenue policies would you advocate?

I support a progressive tax structure that does not drive New Yorkers away. A sales tax increase is regressive.

7. What fiscal policies would you advocate to help New York City maintain public services during the current recession?

Make spending more efficient and more transparent.
Make the Department of Education accountable for spending.

8. In your view, where does CUNY stand, as a priority, in New York's economic development and economic recovery?

CUNY is critical because we need an educated workforce to be competitive in the global economy. Investing in education is not spending but an investment that pays off by empowering our residents.

9. Academic freedom is important because adherence to it allows colleges and universities to best serve the public interest. For this reason, the university must be a place where all ideas, even those that are unpopular, may be freely expressed and debated without interference from management, trustees or public officials. Yet, for short-term political advantage, politicians have undermined academic freedom by publicly attacking unpopular speech by faculty and calling for punitive action by college or university managements. Such public calls go beyond simple disagreement.

9a. Do you agree that it is necessary to uphold academic freedom at CUNY and other colleges and universities? Will you agree to avoid taking unfair political advantage of unpopular speech on campuses?

Absolutely.

9b. Academic freedom also extends to pedagogical practices, academic standards and curriculum and program decisions. Who do you believe is best placed to make determinations about these matters: faculty, college administrators, community organizations, private businesses, or public officials?

Faculty and college administrators.

10. Do you believe that public employees should have the same right to strike as private employees?
Please explain?

Yes. Public employees lack of a right to strike deprives them of a needed tool to force good faith bargaining.

11. In general, public employees have had more generous health and pension benefits than private employees. Some politicians have used this disparity to argue for a diminution of public employee benefits and blamed New York's fiscal problems on such benefits. Do you believe public employees' health and pension benefits should be maintained, reduced, or enhanced? Please be as specific as possible.

All benefits should be maintained.

12. Incumbents, please list your committee and subcommittee memberships and indicate if you are chair:

NA. However, please note that for several years I was Co-Chair of the Education Committee of the non-partisan good government organization The City Club of New York.

13. Please list the bills you have introduced or co-sponsored in support of CUNY and higher education, or other actions you have taken in this cause:

NA

14. Please list other legislation that you have introduced or co-sponsored in the last two legislative sessions:

NA

15. Please describe other actions you have taken in support of union-related initiatives:
As a private citizen, I have always supported union activities and I don't cross picket lines.

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

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We encourage you to send the questionnaire and attachments via email or by fax.