

2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

Candidate for City Council
(Borough President, City Council, Comptroller, District Attorney, Mayor, Public Advocate,)

City Council District: 1

Borough: Manhattan

Name: Margaret S. Chin

Campaign Address: 215 Park Row, Suite #2 (Chatham Green) New York, NY 10038

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Email Address: MargaretChin2009@gmail.com

Political Party Affiliation: Democrat

Occupation: Full-time candidate / former educator, director of Non-Profit organization & community organizer

Current Employment / Employer: N/A

Are you an incumbent: No

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

Education:

High School: Bronx Science

College: City College (BS – Education)

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

- Pell Grant
- NYS Tuition Assistance Program
- Scholarship
- Self

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

- Government

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?

Obviously, the budget for CUNY needs to be increased. There are two ways to support increases to CUNY budgets- by raising taxes on higher-income New Yorkers, and by eliminating the outside expenditures in the system. The first measure, increases taxes on New Yorkers making over \$200,000 per year, would increase the amount of funding in the system. The second, cutting spending on consultants and sub-contractors, would allow more money to be spent on essential educational functions such as teachers and support staff.

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?

When I attended CCNY, tuition was free. I believe that every student should be able to attend University or Community College, regardless of financial status. Increasing funding from the State for CUNY would help defray these tuition hikes; similarly, bringing in New York's fair share of Federal education funding for the tax dollars we send to Washington would help avoid charging students more tuition. I also believe that we need to raise the income thresholds for Pell grants and other tuition assistance.

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?

I disagree with a philosophy in which higher education is gearing towards future employment and paychecks. Students should not be forced to be saddled with debt in order to earn a degree. It is the responsibility of government to education our youth. I would encourage a public service funding program, where tuition for all students is waived in exchange for some measure of public service after graduation. Higher education should be about higher learning, not just higher income.

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.

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

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

Obviously, CUNY needs better funding. But it also needs to examine some of its administrative and other costs. While adjunct professors and support staff are squeezed with lower wages and increasing job insecurity, administrative costs have not declined to the degree that staff salaries have. On top of funding increases from the State and City budgets, as well as Federal grants and programs, CUNY should look to re-allocate its budget with a view to its professional staff and the quality of education for its students.

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?

One of the most important changes that needs to be made for adjunct faculty and support staff is to improve job security. Short-term contracts and the uncertainty of the semester-to-semester employment system take a toll on non-tenured faculty, and budget cuts threaten the livelihood of support staff. Longer-term contracts, with good wages and benefits, are important for the quality of education at CUNY and the working conditions of faculty and staff.

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 am a progressive Democrat, and I believe in a progressive taxation system. We need to raise tax rates on those New Yorkers making the most, especially those earning over \$200,000 a year and more. New Yorkers like our Mayor should pay their fair share to support and improve the infrastructure that makes our City great. Especially in areas where City resources such as public schools draw people into luxury housing and new developments, higher-income New Yorkers need to shoulder more of the burden of supporting the poorest among us and the infrastructure of New York.

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

I think some of New York's current fiscal policies can and should be changed to maintain public services during the current recession. For example, no tax abatements should be given to developers for new luxury developments. This is especially important given the amount of vacant luxury housing in the City. Further, New York should limit the use of outside contractors and consultants, who cost the city millions every year in unnecessary costs.

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

CUNY should be a top priority. An educated workforce in the city will be essential to New York's economic development and economic recovery. I have always been an advocate for education, and think that our public education systems, from nursery to graduate schools, must be well funded to keep New York and New Yorkers at the cutting edge.

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?

I absolutely agree that it is necessary to uphold academic freedom at CUNY. As a former educator and University administrator, I firmly believe in the importance of academic freedom. The ability to engage in

free and open discourse, regardless of political pressure, is one of the most essential elements of higher education and of democracy broadly.

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?

I believe that pedagogical decisions should be made primarily by those individuals engaged in the academic process. While I do see a limited role for University administrators in curricular development and other academic issues, I believe that the vast majority of academic decisions should rest with the faculty. I do not see a major role for business or elected officials in setting standards or curricula, and certainly not in specific academic decisions such as course content.

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

I do. One of the most important tactics that employees have in organizing for their rights is the ability to strike. While I believe that the City should have some ability to keep essential services operational at all times, I do not believe that there is ever a situation which should prevent employees, public or private, from organizing for fair wages, benefits, employee safety, or equal treatment.

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.

I believe that all employees are entitled to good benefits, regardless of whether they are public or private employees. The fact that public employee unions have largely been able to secure more generous benefits for their members should not be seen as an indication that these benefits are in any way wrong. While maintaining these benefits has certainly increased costs for New York, there are many larger factors (such as the use of outside contracts and consultants) which have had a larger negative impact on New York's budget.

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

N/A

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:

N/A

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

N/A

15. Please describe other actions you have taken in support of union-related initiatives:

I have been a member of CUNY PSC for over 14 years. In the past, I have supported Daily

News reporters, the Writers' Guild, NY Telephone workers, and others on strikes and picket lines. I have always been an activist on issues of importance to labor: affordable housing, living wages, equality, jobs, and education. I have worked with organizers from unions from 1199 to the UAW on issues in district 1, including housing and fair jobs.

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

Professional Staff Congress / CUNY
61 Broadway, Suite 1500
New York, New York 10006
(212) 354-1252
Fax: (212) 302-7815
Attention: Amanda Magalhaes
amagalhaes@pscmail.org

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



About Margaret

Margaret Chin immigrated to the U.S. with her family from Hong Kong in 1963 when she was nine years old. She grew up in NYC Chinatown and attended P.S. 130 and JHS 65. She graduated from the Bronx High School of Science and from the City College of New York (CCNY) with a degree in education. It was at City College through taking Asian Studies courses that Margaret got involved in community organizing. For more than 30 years she has dedicated herself to public service to help immigrants, low income and working families.

Margaret worked for 14 years at LaGuardia Community College's Division of Adult and Continuing Education helping immigrant adults get a college education. Many of her students learned English, got a college degree and built a better life for their families.

For the past 11 years Margaret worked at Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), an organization that she helped to form when she was in college. As the deputy executive director, Margaret led the organization's work in advocacy, community organizing and coalition building. She fought for the preservation and building of affordable housing; better access to government services; equal opportunity and fair treatment, for immigrants, low income and working families. Margaret left her position at AAFE at the end of August 2008 to focus on her City Council Campaign.

In her many years of public service she served on boards of many not-for-profit organizations. Margaret was formerly the Chairperson of the NY Immigration Coalition (NYIC). She was a board member of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) and chaired the Advocacy Committee. Margaret was a founding member of Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation (CPLDC) and served as the vice-chair of the board. Additionally, Margaret served as chair of the Census Bureau's Race and Ethnicity Advisory Committee on the Asian and Pacific Islander Population for Census 2000. Margaret was a member of Community Board 3 and Community Board 1. Margaret was also one of the founding members of Asian Americans for Equality, where she served as President of the board from 1982 to 1986. In 2003 Margaret was a Fannie Mae Foundation Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

As an advocate for civic participation and voter education, Margaret was elected to the Democratic State Committee for two terms from 1986 to 1990. Margaret ran for City Council in 1991, 1993 and 2001. She fought hard to get bilingual ballots for the Asian community.

Margaret is married to Alan Tung, a public school teacher at P.S. 3 in Greenwich Village. Their son, Kevin, attended public schools and graduated from the Bronx High School of Science and Syracuse University. Margaret's mom is a retired garment worker and still lives in Chinatown.