

2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

Candidate for: City Council, District Two
Borough: Manhattan

Name: Rosie Mendez
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Political Party Affiliation: Democrat

Occupation: NYC Councilwoman

Current Employment / Employer: The City of New York

Are you an incumbent: Yes No Number of years in office 3 ½

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

Education:

High School: John Dewey H.S 50 Avenue X Brooklyn, NY
College: New York University, 70 Washington Sq. New York, NY
Graduate / Professional: Rutgers School of Law- 123 Washington Street. Newark, NJ

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

- Pell Grant
- NYS Tuition Assistance Program
- Scholarship
- Student Loans
- Family
- Self
- Other Source _____

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

- Students
- Parents / Family
- Government
- Employers
- All of the above

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?

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

New York City needs to make CUNY a priority and preserve it as this institution of higher education. New York City must fully fund CUNY and lobby the State for its fair share of funding. As a City Councilmember, I have fought to provide more funding to CUNY.

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?

We should provide more scholarships, and we should forgive or abate student's indebtedness based on how many years s/he is living in New York City, how many years s/he remains in New York City upon graduation, and/or if they take a public sector job.

- 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. Students taking on more loans results in more indebtedness. Many students struggle to repay these loans and as a result: 1-do not pursue higher degrees; 2- do not pursue public sector jobs or jobs at not-for-profit organizations; and 3- drop out without obtaining their degrees.

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?

I have and will continue to advocate for funding in new York city's budget. In addition, I think we should look at whether we can pass legislation that specifies that a certain percentage of the staff has to be full time workers.

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 faculty and staff should receive the same benefits as full-time employees, especially if you have been working there a certain amount of years

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 believe we should have a progressive income tax. I advocated for an increase in the hotel tax in the last fiscal year and in this one. I voted for an increase in the property tax to alleviate budget shortfall, but clear

that we couldn't go there again anytime soon. I voted against 421 a tax legislation that gave developers tax breaks for building luxury housing with only 20% affordability.

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

We need to really make a concerted effort as a legislative body to institute a progressive income tax.

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

I believe CUNY should be a high priority and I believe that the current mayor has not made it so. The New York City as a body needs to make CUNY one of its highest priorities.

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 have been an outspoken defender of our First Amendment Rights and I consider speeches by faculty to be a part of that. I will defend anyone's right to free speech, and if I don't like what someone is saying I may exercise my right to protest or boycott the event.

- 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 the faculty with the administrators should define the practices, standards and curriculum at the school.

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

I believe we should repeal the Taylor Law as applicable to all NYC employees except the police and fire departments.

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.

Under no circumstances should any health or pension benefits be reduced, it should be maintained or enhanced. I don't think we can even begin to compare public employee benefits with the kind we have seen in the private sector of corporate America.

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

Chair, Subcommittee on Public Housing; Member; Housing & Buildings; Lower Manhattan Redevelopment; Land Use; Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting, and Maritime Use; Health.

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:

I have fought for funding for CUNY during the last four budgets. In addition, I have allocated substantial capital funding to Baruch College totaling \$938,000 and \$70,000 to Hunter College's Puerto Rican Studies program.

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

I have only been in office for one legislative session. I have introduced and passed legislation to advance the rights of tenants. I have also introduced legislation that would establish the right to counsel for seniors, language access, mold abatement, sanctions against restaurants that violate labor laws, a ban on the display of exotic animals, first amendment assembly bill, and co-sponsored numerous other pieces of legislation.

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

I have attended countless protests as an advocate and as a councilmember. I was a supporter of allowing graduates students at NYU and Columbia University's the right to unionize. More recently, I supported the right of the Stella D'oro workers to unionize. In addition, I have been working with several unions on putting pressure on Puerto Rico's Governor to resume collective bargaining.

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

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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.