

2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

Candidate for ___City Council, 9th District
(Borough President, City Council, Comptroller, District Attorney, Mayor, Public Advocate,)

City Council District: ___9_____

Borough: ___Manhattan_____

Name: _____Inez E. Dickens_____

Campaign Address: ___2155 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd._____
_____New York, NY 10027_____

Telephone #s: ___212-662-0694_____

Email Address: ___lamon.bland@gmail.com (Campaign Manager)

Political Party Affiliation: ___Democrat_____

Occupation: ___Member of the City Council_____

Current Employment / Employer: _____New York City Council_____

Are you an incumbent: Yes ___X___ 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? ___2_____

Education:

High School: Julia Richman High School

College: Howard University, Major: Business

Graduate/Professional: Univ. of Chicago and Univ. of Atlanta

**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

(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?

As a Member in my first term, I have been fortunate to set aside almost \$5 million for projects at City College, which serves my district. These projects include the Gatehouse Theater, Aronen Theater, Aaron Davis Hall, North Academic Center and the Rangel Center for Public Service. I have been fortunate to provide expense funding to the Rangel Center and the Center for the Study of Harlem, as well as the Early Childhood Day Center at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, which I have funded four years in a row. As the only black woman in Leadership at the City Council, I have fought to preserve the Black Male Initiative which operates at CUNY campuses. I continue to be a strong supporter of the Vallone Scholarship program and I have carried the CUNY Creative Arts Team initiative during my term here in the Council.

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?

First, the Peter Vallone Scholarship program should be expanded to assist many more students, especially those from underserved backgrounds. However, the City Council will need to work more effectively to influence our Colleagues in Federal government to expand access to Pell grants and affordable financial aid. These efforts will bring down tuition prices for City students without compromising the quality of CUNY education.

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

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

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?

While I do not feel it is fair to students coming out of universities now, entering a extremely difficult job market with high debt ratios and other crippling financial obligations with no real options to begin paying these debts back, our higher education system may not permit an easy policy switch. Without a doubt, as the one part of the foundation of our country's future, our college graduates need the government's help to find new ways to manage the financial obligations that higher education, a required qualification in our modern economy, imposes. In that light, CUNY tuition prices must be kept low in order to continue providing quality, low-cost higher education to all of the City's students.

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?

Hiring more full-time faculty and staff is the best way to improve the education we provide CUNY students while also improving the quality of life of our employees. In order to achieve this goal, though, the CUNY system needs better funding from all levels of government. On the City Council, I have been fighting to bring more City money to CUNY and education in general. I also believe that we must obtain funding from the state and national governments, so we can increase full-time staff and give much-deserved pay raises to current faculty. CUNY will remain one of my top priorities as I fight for educational institutions on the City Council.

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?

First and foremost, adjunct professors and staff should have access to the full unemployment benefits they deserve. I fully support legislation that would allow adjunct employees, who are otherwise entitled to receive Unemployment Insurance benefits, to receive the same benefits as their full-time counterparts. Adjunct faculty and staff are critical to the success of all CUNY Colleges, and they should receive the benefits and insurance they deserve.

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?

This City should take a lesson from our experiences in dealing with the financial crisis of the 1970s and sell MAC Bonds again. The City could also consider a higher-education dedicated lottery that would raise revenue for permanent faculty and professional staff. These decisions would generate significant revenue for the City, which would in turn allow continued public services with minimal tax increases during these trying economic times.

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

Unfortunately, since the City Charter requires that New York City pass a balanced budget each year prior to the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1, there is only one way to maintain the same level of services when revenue is declining. Doing this requires raising new revenues through avenues of revenue like reinstating the commuter tax, raising real estate taxes, raising water taxes or creation and sale of municipal bonds, among other methods. Only through the designation of new revenue streams will the City be able to maintain all services at current levels.

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

CUNY should be one of the highest priorities for economic development in New York City. It will remain at the very top of my list of economic development priorities. The CUNY system employs hundreds of people in a wide variety of jobs and occupations. In addition, university systems in the United States, through research and development of new technology and services, have always been a primary economic driver from which localities near them have benefited. In addition, increasing access to higher education increases the productivity of our economy in the long-term and will yield economic and societal benefits throughout the City.

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?

Yes.

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?

CUNY administrators and faculty, who have the most experience with issues of academic standards and curriculum, should be empowered to make decisions regarding academic freedom in CUNY Colleges. Public officials should not become overly involved in the administration of our higher education system. Rather, they should provide an environment in which higher education can flourish, with adequate funding and guaranteed academic freedom.

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

Employees in any industry should be able to use all available tools and methods to properly negotiate with management. Public employees provide invaluable services to New York City, and they should be guaranteed the same labor rights as their counterparts in the private sector.

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.

As a public employee myself, I believe our benefits should be maintained, if not enhanced. Without public employees, the subway doesn't run, waste doesn't get collected, and our students do not learn. These workers are vital to the prosperity of our city, and they should receive benefits commensurate with their service to us all.

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

Standards & Ethics – Chair

Cultural Affairs, Libraries & Intergroup Relations

Governmental Operations

Health

Land Use AND the Land Use Subcommittee on Planning, Dispositions & Concessions

Rules, Privileges & Elections

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:

Intro. 405 – Providing an educational assistance program for City officers and employees

Reso. 1828 – Calling upon the City of New York to allocate matching funds for capital appropriations provided by the State of New York for community colleges of the City of New York

Reso. 1662 – Calling upon Congress to include student loans in the federal government's \$700 billion bailout package

Reso. 858-A – Calling upon the US Congress to repeal the provision of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 that bars students with drug convictions from receiving federal financial aid for college

Reso. 1211 – Calling upon the NYS Legislature to reclassify Medgar Evers College as a four-year post-secondary institution for capital budget purposes

Reso. 15 – Calling upon the NYS Legislature to establish a NY Student Bill of Rights

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

Intro. 642-A – Smoking ban on hospital grounds citywide (Expected passage: June 30, 2009)

Intro. 837-A – DC37 Residency Legislation

Intro. 241 – Health coverage to surviving spouse or partner of City retirees

Reso. 1250-A – Calling upon the US Congress to pass, and the President to sign, the Immigrant Child Protection Act (Passed Council: March 26, 2008)

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

Supported security guards represented by 32BJ, co-sponsor and voted in favor of the DC37

Residency Legislation, Spoke at DC1707 Rally for day care workers, Have worked through Budget

Negotiation Team and in Leadership to provide additional money for education to avoid cuts to

the classrooms in NYC public schools, Have been an ardent supporter of the NYCHA employees

represented by Local 371

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.