

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: 11

Borough: Bronx

Name: Oliver Koppell

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Political Party Affiliation: Democratic Party

Occupation: Council Member, District 11

Current Employment / Employer: New York City Government

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

Under the current term limits law, how many more additional terms, after this one, will you be able to serve? 0

Education:

High School: Bronx High School of Science

College: Harvard College

Graduate / Professional: Harvard Law School

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?

I support maximum public contribution within
limits of available resources.

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? Support

4b. Do you support or oppose the CUNY Compact's call for annual tuition increases? support only if absolutely necessary

4c. What would you do to relieve the burden on students and families to pay for CUNY?

I support maximum public funding. We need to
increase PELL grants and state TAP.

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

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?

Disagree. Loans should be a last gap.

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 support increase contribution by all levels of government.

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?

There should be less reliance on part-time adjuncts.

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?

The income tax should be more progressive.
Lowest income individuals should pay no tax. There should be conformity with state tax law.

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

I support PIT surcharge on middle and upper income tax payers.

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

Very high priority. NY should do more for CUNY.

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, I agree.

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.

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

I believe the Taylor law needs revision, but provisions dealing with public employees may require some difference in procedure and approach.

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.

☑ Maintained. I support comprehensive health insurance for all public employees.

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

Chair, Mental Health
 Member: Finance, Education, Consumer Affairs,
 Environmental Protection, Technology, Community
 Development, Transportation

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:

The Committee I chair at the City Council has the responsibility for oversight of the City's Disability Services. In this capacity, I co-chaired an oversight hearing with the Committee on Higher Education Services. This ~~oversight~~ hearing, which was held at my suggestion, was focused on the barriers to access that students and staff with disabilities face at various campuses. I conceptualized + helped to organize a new summer program to train NYC college students to work in resorts + summer camps hosted by the

CUNY's

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

- Local Law 2003/010: Enhancing the protections for whistleblowers.
- Local Law 2005/085: Expanding NYC Human Rights Law to include domestic partnership statutes.
- Local Law 2007/011: Requiring that any benefit or service directly provided by the city of NY to persons based on spousal relationships shall be available to domestic partners.
- Local Law 2005/119: Regarding the City's use of energy efficient products.

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

I supported the repeal of residency requirements for NYC employees. I also supported the strikers at the Kingsbridge Heights Nursing Home and the Stella D'ora workers who are on strike in Kingsbridge.