

2009 Professional Staff Congress/CUNY Questionnaire for NYC Candidates

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

City Council District: 33 (current, not candidate for)

Borough: Brooklyn (current, not candidate for)

Name: David Yassky

Campaign Address: 386 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10116

Telephone #s: (212) 683 9200

Email Address: david@davidyassky.com

Political Party Affiliation: Democrat

Occupation: NYC City Council Member

Current Employment / Employer: The City of New York

Are you an incumbent: Yes _____ No X (not of position sought) Number of years in office 0

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: The Dalton School

College: Princeton University

Graduate / Professional: Yale 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.)

Providing New Yorkers with higher education is something that each one of these parties has a vested interest in: the current (and future) employers, the general public, the family, and of course, the student. However, it is clear that in many situations for CUNY students, not all of these parties can play an equal part in funding the education, particularly the students and family. We have a responsibility as a public to give these students an opportunity to achieve a higher education.

In these difficult times, we need to explore potential partnerships with employers to set up scholarship funds and education reimbursement programs. Ultimately, however, for something as vital to New Yorkers and our workforce as public education, the government as collaborator can play the key role of facilitating sources of funding (public and private). And as the steward of the public interest, it needs to step in to primarily support the opportunities for CUNY students to get higher education.

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?

The most recent budget plan (CUNY compact) will increase tuition up to \$300 per semester for resident students and \$200 per semester at community colleges. Funds will be leveraged. CUNY compact requests State and City Philanthropy Matching Program \$3 public funds for \$1 philanthropic sources. The philanthropic sector—particularly in New York—is a vast source of education-related funding and we must pay special attention to collaboration with this group of motivated donors. As Comptroller I will seek additional matching programs and scholarship opportunities wherever they may be (public and private) and advocate for higher education as a PRIORITY for funding initiatives. We must avoid what can be considered regressive tuition increases and find alternate ways to fund our CUNY programs where possible.

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? **Support**

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

In the Budget request there is a proposed Financial Assistance Program which includes a CUNY work study program, reduction in textbook prices and tuition payment plans. As Comptroller, there will be ways to assess CUNY's financial operations to identify and facilitate ways we can support the school while also

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

keeping tuition rates low. Beyond work-study, I would again explore potential partnerships and scholarship programs with employers and philanthropic foundations.

- 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?

Agree, but with a caveat. Debt burden—as we have clearly seen with the current economic downturn—has become a dominant and negative factor for many American households, including an increasing amount of students. Furthermore, many students who graduate with debt are forced immediately into an occupation-as-means-to-an-end (specifically, paying off loans), eliminating many great work opportunities and greatly diminishing the students' development in the adult workforce. For example, in an increasing global and specialized economy, grad school is factoring more into the career paths of young people and student loan debt often limits or prohibits this option.

I believe education is an investment overall and do consider student investment by way of loans to be a practical solution. However, as Comptroller, I would identify ways that these loans and any policy structured around them will enhance their careers, not limit them, providing subsidies and incentives for graduate school or work in critical, but lower-paying jobs (like teaching or public service). Again, we could work with non-profits and private sector employers to find innovative low-interest and even tuition reimbursement programs and leverage public funds to specifically target ways to help the students develop in the workforce as opposed merely saddling the start of their adult careers with debt.

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?

Current Comptroller Bill Thompson explored the idea of investing some of the City's funds in affordable housing for New York City teachers. This is an innovative idea, and one I would seek to expand to include teachers and full-time staff at CUNY. It uniquely addresses one of the main impediments to keeping and retaining new teachers: the prohibitive cost of living (housing) in New York City. I would explore ways to implement a housing subsidy program (perhaps in partnership with other public or private firms with a vested interest in supporting the teaching profession) that could alleviate some of the costs, and therefore salary inflation, which prevents CUNY from hiring enough full time employees. I would continue identify and advocate for other ways the City can help cut costs that will provide competitive full-time packages to potential CUNY staff.

Whatever specific plans we might devise to help hire CUNY educators, one thing is sure: I will place a priority on hiring full-time employers and securing funding to do so. Ample full time faculty members not only provide better educational support for our students, but it is proven that long-term residents (and homeowners) improve local economies much more than transitive ones.

- 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?

As alluded to in the previous questions, one way to improve the wages and working conditions of part-time faculty and staff is to make the avenues for full-time employment more attractive and feasible by implementing policies like those mentioned above. However, recognizing that part-time and adjunct staff

are such a large and crucial part of the CUNY workforce, we must find ways to improve their wages and working conditions.

For one example, I would fight to rectify the current situation facing adjunct professors who find out the classes they were depending on for income were canceled last minute and through a loophole, are not qualified for unemployment benefits. I advocate for better planning and assessment on behalf of CUNY faculty and staff to avoid such last minute cancellations, but at the very least, these now unemployed professors should have unemployment rights the same as other workers. Unpredictable and uncertain earnings are among the most stressful factors for any New Yorker and as Comptroller, I would advocate and facilitate ways to "smooth out" compensation for part-time and adjunct professors, offering temporary assistance (as through unemployment) when prudent and necessary.

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?

We need to re-examine many of our old taxes, to assess whether they still make sense in our current fiscal climate. For example, New York City currently taxes freelancers and small entrepreneurs unfairly through the Unincorporated Business Tax, using an archaic tax structure that is simply not appropriate for the modern economy. We also need to look at the tax loopholes that are available to big businesses and determine whether they are actually helping our economy and creating jobs, or merely hurting small businesses by giving big businesses an unfair advantage.

As Comptroller, I will seek input from individual taxpayers and businesses to identify those taxes that may cost us more in lost economic activity than they generate in revenue for the city. I will direct economists within the office to perform economic analyses of any such taxes, and urge the Council and the Mayor to repeal any taxes that create a net loss for the city.

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

We must be innovative, transparent, and eliminate waste. As Comptroller, I would be in a crucial position to oversee critical processes within New York City's financial operations.

As chief investment officer, it is clear that we need to place a priority on transparency with regard to selecting investment managers. We also need to identify innovative ways to diversify and invest our pension funds.

As chief procurement officer, transparency is again crucial to overseeing our city's billions of dollars of private contracts to create an accessible, accountable, fair and competitive hiring process. Additionally, I have championed eliminating waste as one of the most important priorities facing our city in these hard times. I will question the administration's use of contracts where it doesn't make sense and come down hard on unnecessary spending. Too many expenses are overlooked and contracts set up without proper due diligence and without pursuing the best interests of all New Yorkers.

Finally, as chief auditor of city agencies I will again advocate for eliminating wasteful spending and undisciplined financial operations. As a compliment to my priority on making New York a leading city with environmental policy, I will advocate for strict green and efficient policies that will have tremendous financial benefits in terms of cost savings.

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

There is no question that New York City must re-build our economy. If we are to build it stronger and more resilient, we must recognize that the launching point for a truly productive workforce (financially, but also academically, creatively, culturally) is higher education. CUNY is clearly a leading institution for achieving this. I place the utmost priority on CUNY's position in our City's continued economic development and recovery, as evidenced most recently on my part in the Council's fight to reclaim lost funding in the City budget for FY 2010...a battle that was well worth the fight. While I understand the immediate dangers of insolvency and budget short-falls, we must push ourselves hard to find ways to continue CUNY funding or risk losing any potential to create and sustain the promising and productive community that is New York City's livelihood and culture.

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 agree and would oppose any action that is seen as limiting or censoring such academic freedom. Our government—at all levels—is set up specifically to protect ideas and opinions, even the unpopular ones, perhaps especially unpopular ones. Freedom of opinion and speech should be protected against not just direct government censorship, but also through the more subtle censorship found when public officials take political advantage to intimidate or even block unpopular views. I will agree to avoid this as I campaign and continue to do so upon entering any elected office.

- 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?

Public officials are stewards of the public's best interest and are therefore important stakeholders in any discussion of public resources (including education). However, in keeping with the strong theme reflected in the previous answer, as a public official I believe that academic freedom is the utmost public interest and must be upheld (so long as no harm or impingement of civil rights befalls anyone as a result). To this end, I believe the faculty and college administrators should cooperate to be the primary decision makers about program decisions. We cannot afford infighting and distraction that comes from factions and narrow agendas and must strike a balance between public transparency and feedback and execution of overall educational goals. As long as adequate public dialogue exists and school faculty and administrators are held accountable for these overall goals, they are best equipped to make determinations about these specific academic practices and program decisions.

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

Agree. One of the effects of the Taylor Law has been to restrict the ability of public employees to fight for fair rights through striking. It also lacks the incentives necessary for government officials and union organizers to negotiate terms in a timely basis. No one wins when agreements cannot be made and as Comptroller, I would fight to make sure that these unfair policies are rectified – and would advocate for strict enforcement and further revisions that incentive timely negotiations.

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.

Quite the to the contrary of the argument cited in the question, I believe it should be the other way around: we should use this disparity to advocate better benefits for all workers—using public employee benefits as a goal to work toward, not break down. We must find ways to maintain, and where possible, enhance public employee benefits. As the City faces tremendous economic challenges, we must find innovative ways to do this in a manner that won't bring the pension funds to insolvency. One way is to find how to support the cost of living increase, especially among the Baby Boomers. Along the lines of what I've mentioned earlier, this could come in the form of affordable housing investment with City funds along with reform in the healthcare system—two expenses that place undue burden on retiring public employees. As Comptroller, I would also seek federal and state funds available to support the pension benefits and ensure that they are being used effectively and for their intended purpose.

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

Small Business (Chair); Economic Development; Education; Finance; Lower Manhattan Redevelopment; Public Safety; Sanitation & Solid Waste Management

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:

Certainly, the most recent action was approving the City budget for FY 2010 only after the funding for CUNY had been almost all restored. As I mentioned, education is vital for our city's re-growth and even with (or perhaps because of) our uncertain financial health, I will seek opportunities to support CUNY as we create a strong and resilient workforce.

Additionally, in 2004, I introduced a resolution to waive tuition and fees at CUNY for disabled military veterans or their children and spouses.

In 2003, I co-sponsored a bill to provide and expand access to education and training for public assistance recipients (it was vetoed by the Mayor but eventually over-ridden by the Council).

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

Beyond higher education, I have championed many issues and present the following as just a sample of some of the successes:

- Jobs and economic growth:
 - Authored the Film Industry Job Creation Act, credited with bringing thousands of jobs to New York's film and television studios.

- Also pushed through the Council a plan to make Downtown Brooklyn the City's third major business district
- Created an Industrial Jobs Retention program to fund dedicated, low-cost space for manufacturing firms, and
- Helped expand the cruise ship industry in New York.
- Public Safety:
 - Took on irresponsible gun companies with the Gun Industry Responsibility Act. This law will hold gun manufactures and dealers liable when their reckless sales practices result in the injury of a New Yorker.
- Environmental Protection:
 - In the last election cycle, I was the only City Council Member to receive an "early endorsement" from the League of Conservation Voters, which called my Waterfront Planning Act "the most important piece of waterfront legislation adopted by the City in recent years."
 - Created an innovative pilot program for clean-fuel taxicabs that got hybrid cabs on the road in NYC
 - Sued Exxon-Mobil to force a cleanup of the Greenpoint oil spill, and
 - My report on illegal dumping in New York waterways led to prosecution of one of the City's worst polluters.
- Affordable Housing:
 - My Affordable Housing Zoning Initiative will create thousands of new moderately priced apartments. The plan creates zoning incentives for developers building luxury apartments in newly rezoned areas to finance companion affordable projects.

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

As a few highlights:

I have introduced and co-sponsored numerous initiatives to eliminate City wasteful spending through private contracting and calling on increased scrutiny for how services are contracted out. Recently, I co-signed a letter to Deputy Mayor of Operations Edward Skyler calling for this. [See attached letter].

2006 – co-sponsored a bill (now Local Law) to extend funeral benefits to NYC auxiliary police officers

2005 – co-sponsored a bill to extend health insurance coverage to the surviving spouse of surviving domestic partner of city retirees.

2005 - I introduced a bill (now Local Law) that increased fines for employers that locked their employees inside a workplace or obstructed the exits.

2004 - I co-sponsored a bill to support job training and apprenticeship programs to recognize and encourage development of a skilled workforce.

2004 – introduces False Claims Act as a way to protect/encourage city workers who report fraud perpetrated by contracted firms. (similar to federal Whistleblower Act).

2004 – co-sponsored a bill (now Local Law) to call for equal employment benefits to the employees of city contractors

2003 – co-sponsored a resolution calling for employers to provide fair insurance for mental health and chemical dependency services

2003 – introduced a bill to protect the benefits of workers by prohibiting employees who are convicted of serious crimes from collecting public benefits.

2002 - I co-sponsored a bill (now local law) that ensures that low-wage workers employed by firms receiving certain service contracts from the City of New York are paid a living wage and provided health benefits.

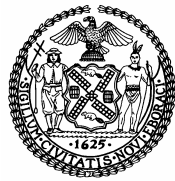
2002 – co-sponsored a resolution to protect the rights and dignity of domestic workers (housekeepers, nannies, homecare workers, etc)

2002 – co-sponsored bill (now Local law) to recognize marriages not recognized by New York State, domestic partnerships, and civil unions, lawfully entered in other jurisdictions.

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.



THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

April 7, 2009

Edward Skyler
Deputy Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Deputy Mayor Skyler:

We urge you to consider alternative cost-saving measures before cutting another dollar from our overburdened City agencies and services. The City's budget for private contractor and consultant services has increased from \$6.5 billion in FY 2005 to \$9.2 billion in FY 2009, resulting in a \$2.5 billion, or 37% rise in spending. This extraordinary amount represents the equivalent of 15% of the city's tax-levy budget and more than 46% of the city's controllable spending. Before any additional cuts from the budget are made, it is imperative that the City do an in-depth analysis of where private contractor and consultant services can be replaced with civil servants. Indeed, New York has the ability to save \$130 million by foregoing these costly services.

In 2004, the City adopted a policy to convert thousands of clerical and consultant workers to permanent employee status, resulting in savings of \$75 million. We know that this process works — the only question is where is best to find additional savings. Here is a list we believe you should start with:


- **The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** The School Health Program could save more than \$8.8 million by hiring Public Health Nurses to replace nursing contracts.
- **The Human Resources Administration:** Replacing custodial contracts with City Job Training Participants in the Transitional Workfare Program could save \$14.5 million.
- **The Department of Transportation:** Savings of \$2.9 million could be achieved by using city workers instead of contractors to install regulation and enforcement street signs.

- **The Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications:** \$21.6 million could be saved by ending contracts with computer consultants for non-technical work. An additional \$4.3 to \$5 million could be saved by staffing a call center with civil servants.
- **The Department of Homeless Services:** Over \$51 million could be saved by ending the agency's use of "per diem" hotels and motels to house homeless citizens.
- **The Department of Parks and Recreation:** The city could save \$12.6 million by using in-house personnel to perform landscape design services for eight city parks.
- **The New York City Fire Department:** Terminating contracts for bookkeeping and accounting services could save the city over \$5.4 million.
- **The Department of Education:** Over \$3.9 million could be saved by ending contracts with private food delivery companies and \$2.9 million from ending temp agency contracts.

Given the current economic climate, we must find creative ways to cut duplicative and unnecessary spending without diminishing quality of life for New Yorkers who rely on core government services. Before we entertain any cuts to City agencies, the Mayor must present us with a serious proposal to reduce unnecessary costs related to all private contractor and consultant services. Implementing the above suggestions will save New York desperately needed funds while avoiding the need to cut essential services.

We look forward to working with your office on this proposal. Please let us know how we may be of assistance in implementing these suggestions.

Sincerely,



David Yassky
Council Member, 33rd District



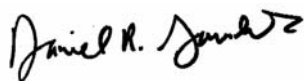
Tony Avella
Council Member, 19th District



Lewis Fidler
Council Member, 46th District



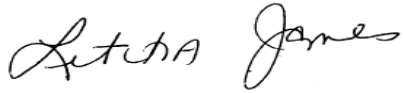
Helen Diane Foster
Council Member, 16th District



Daniel R. Garodnick
Council Member, 4th District



Robert Jackson
Council Member, 7th District



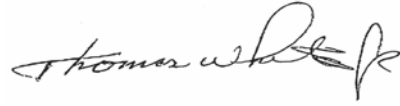
Letitia James
Council Member, 35th District



Jessica Lappin
Council Member, 5th District



Melissa Mark-Viverito
Council Member, 8th District



Thomas White, Jr.
Council Member, 28th District



In his seven years on the New York City Council, Council Member David Yassky has been a leading voice for reform, accountability and innovation. The New York Times recently praised David for his “stellar record on the Council, leading groundbreaking work on gun control, affordable housing, the environment and jobs creation.”

As Chair of the Council’s Small Business Committee, David has been a force for job creation and economic development. His legislative accomplishments include the Film Industry Job Creation Act, which is credited with bringing thousands of jobs to New York's film and television studios. He also pushed through a small business tax cut, formulated a plan to make Downtown Brooklyn the City’s third major business district, created an Industrial Jobs Retention program to fund dedicated, low-cost space for manufacturing firms, and helped expand the cruise ship industry in New York.

David has also used his seat on the Council to fight for accountability and fiscal responsibility. He passed the False Claims Act to help root out corruption by rewarding whistleblowers who report the misuse of taxpayer dollars, exposed millions of dollars of waste at the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and put forward an aggressive plan to end the abuse of earmarks in the budget process. His willingness to get tough on waste, inefficiency and fraud led Errol Louis of the *New York Daily News* to call David a “budget hawk,” who “understands how serious government waste has become.”

David’s environmental record is unmatched on the Council because he understands that long-term growth can only exist in conjunction with environmental sustainability. His numerous accomplishments include his innovative program for clean-fuel taxicabs that got hybrid cabs on the road, which led Mayor Michael Bloomberg to say that David is “leading the environmental fight here in New York City.”

He sued Exxon-Mobil to force a cleanup of the Greenpoint oil spill, and issued a report on illegal dumping in New York waterways, which led to the prosecution of one of the City's worst polluters. He also drafted the Waterfront Planning Act, which the New York City League of Conservation Voters called “the most important piece of waterfront legislation adopted by the City in recent years.”

David has been an outspoken advocate for education reform and recently co-chaired the Council’s task force on school governance. His advocacy in the area of affordable housing includes creating thousands of moderately priced apartments through his Affordable Housing Zoning Initiative.



Before his election to the Council, Yassky had a distinguished career as a public servant, lawyer and educator. As Chief Counsel to the House Subcommittee on Crime under Chuck Schumer, he helped enact the Brady Law, the Assault Weapons Ban, the Violence Against Women Act, the 100,000 Cops on the Beat Law, and more than a dozen other significant anti-crime statutes.

After serving under Representative Schumer, David joined the private sector, practicing corporate law and working with major financial institutions on complex regulatory and legal issues. He also served as a budget analyst for New York City’s Office of Management and Budget, where he developed a comprehensive understanding of the city’s intricate budgeting process and deep knowledge of how the City spends taxpayers’ money.

David earned his B.A. at Princeton University, and his J.D. at Yale Law School. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Diana, and their daughters Susan and Margaret.