

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: _____

Borough: _____

Name: John C. Liu

Campaign Address:

35-06 Leavitt Stree
Flushing, NY 11354

Telephone #s: 718-360-9393

Email Address: john@liunewyork.com

Political Party Affiliation: Democrat

Occupation: Elected Officiall

Current Employment I Employer: City Council

Are you an incumbent: Yes No

Number of years in office: 8 years in elected office

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

Education:

High School: _____

College: Binghamton University

Graduate / Professional: _____



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?

The Comptroller's office has the power of examination and forecasting of the City's budget to clearly link between investment in education, particularly higher education at our CUNY facilities, and our long-term economic benefit for the City. As Comptroller, I would support a larger share of municipal budget for CUNY and I am pleased that the Mayor shares my views on the need to expand budget priorities for 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.

4 a. Do you support or oppose the current tuition increases? Oppose

4 b. Do you support or oppose the CUNY Compact's call for annual tuition increases? Oppose

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

Again, I would advocate for a larger share of the municipal budget to support CUNY as well as advocate for additional state and federal resources to relieve the burden on students and families on tuition costs.

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

4 d. 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?

Tuition should be lowered through greater government investment in our educational system. Students and their families should not be saddled with debt and mounting loans. We should not finance higher education with continued skyrocketing tuition hikes which will keep many talented New York City students from entering one of the educational crown jewels of the City and the Nation.

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.

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

It comes at no surprise that CUNY enrollments are at record levels as students and faculty recognize the school's outstanding history of producing first rate scholars and providing students with enriching studies to prepare them for the professional fields. But as with many of the City's magnet programs and institutions, we have not made the necessary investment to grow the talent at CUNY. I greatly value my education and know it is the key to my success. As Comptroller, I will continue to be a strong advocate in calling for increased budgets for CUNY and find additional public-private partnerships that will also increase the number of full-time faculty and professional staff.

5 b. 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?

The university and by budgetary fiat, the city and state should not take advantage of the willingness of experience part-time faculty to teach as a substitute for appointed qualified tenured professors. I would follow PSC's model of promoting qualified, experienced adjunct staff to full-time professor positions. I

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would also work with PSC to advocate for a sensible model for limiting the number of years a qualified teacher can serve as an adjunct until the university has to promote them to an open full-time position in their area of expertise.

- 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?
New York City's income tax rates must be more progressive and the burden must be shared. No one likes to pay more taxes but higher level income earners can afford to contribute more and would be willing to do so if the tax structure is reformed and burden shared. It makes little sense that a CUNY professor pays the same tax rate as Mayor Mike Bloomberg. We must make reform a priority.
- 7) What fiscal policies would you advocate to help New York City maintain public services during the current recession?
Eliminating waste at EDC and IDA in the form of corporate giveaways with no clear benefit to taxpayers would be one of my priorities. Also managing risk-adjusted returns on pension funds to obviate the need for additional required contributions from taxpayers.
- 8) In your view, where does CUNY stand, as a priority, in New York's economic development and economic recovery?
CUNY opens the doors of opportunity and levels the playing field for immigrants and working families across the City. Immigrants and other working men and women seek higher education and additional professional skills to better their search for employment and gain access to the workforce. In this time of economic strain, CUNY's ability to help provide vocational training in growing industries will put these graduates to work. Therefore, CUNY's success is a key and a priority to New York's economic recovery and success.
- 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.
- 9 a. 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, absolutely.

9 b. 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 All of these determinations are best made by faculty with the exception of academic standards, where faculty should have strong binding input at the minimum.

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

The law should be better defined so that negotiations are not so biased against public employees. Collective bargaining rules and regulations should treat both public and private unions equally and fairly. Our current system does not do this. I would support efforts to reform the state labor laws to allow more flexibility regarding work actions to public sector collective bargaining units.

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.

Costs in both public and private sectors need control. Changes should be effectuated through the collective bargaining process. Diminution by imposing Tier V pension benefits would be wrong and counterproductive. Robust health and pension benefits are the hallmark of a strong stable community. Often state and municipal budgetary burdens originate elsewhere in the budget but workers benefits take the hit. This is an unfair practice. As Comptroller, I would examine the budget for real structural problems and advocate for reasonable solutions that do not involve diminishing benefits.

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

I am running for City Comptroller. Currently I am a member of the City Council and Chair of the Transportation Committee and member of the Education, Health, Consumer Affairs, Contracts, Land Use, Oversight and Investigations, and Lower Manhattan Redevelopment.

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:

Res 0067-2002

6/5/2002 Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to adopt Assembly Bill A.9556, which amends Section 6206 of the Education Law, in relation to requiring that the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York charge the same rate of tuition.

Res 0498-2002

2/26/2003 Resolution calling upon Congress to pass legislation repealing the provisions of federal law that discourage states from providing in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrants and permitting long-time resident youth with good moral character who move

Res 0696-2003

4/9/2003 Resolution in support of affirmative action admission policies in higher education that take into consideration race and ethnicity among many factors used in making admissions decisions, as such policies serve a compelling state interest for institutions

Res 0843-2003

4/30/2003 Resolution calling upon Governor George Pataki to withdraw a Fiscal Year 2003-2004 budget proposal to cut funding to the City University of New York, and further calling upon the New York State Legislature to reject all Fiscal Year 2003-2004 budget proposal.

Res 1662-2008

Resolution calling upon Congress to include student loans in the federal government's \$700 billion bailout package.

Res 0703-2003

12/31/2003 Resolution congratulating and commending the City University of New York's Chancellor Dr. Matthew Goldstein, President Edison O. Jackson of Medgar Evers College, and President Gerald W. Lynch of John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

Res 0676-2004

12/31/2005 Resolution calling upon Governor George E. Pataki and the New York State Legislature to enact legislation that would waive tuition and fees at City University of New York institutions for New York City residents who are either disabled military veterans.

Res 0229-2004

12/31/2005 Resolution calling upon Governor George Pataki and the New York State Legislature to adequately fund the City University of New York so as to return it to a tuition-free system.

- 14) Please list other legislation that you have introduced or co-sponsored in the last two legislative sessions:
Key bills include:
- Bicycles on Sidewalks Bill (Local Law 14 of 2002) – Prohibits bicycle-riding on City sidewalks in the interest of ensuring pedestrian safety
 - Equal Access Bill (Local Law 73 of 2003) – Mandates on-demand language services in City agencies that provide health and human services
 - Minors in Internet Cafés Bill (Local Law 59 of 2005) – Restricts minors from using Internet/gaming cafés during school hours
 - Clean-Air Taxis Bill (Local Law 72 of 2005) – Introduced the operation of clean-air hybrid-electric taxicabs in NYC fleets
 - Price-Gouging by Gas Stations Bill (Local Law 38 of 2006) – Prohibits gas stations from hiking prices more than once in a 24-hour period
 - Parking Regulations Online Bill (Local Law 58 of 2007) – Mandates all City parking regulations to be searchable online by City block (Effective September 2009)
 - School Zone Engine Idling Bill (Local Law 5 of 2009) – Limits engine idling to one-minute adjacent to any school
- 15) Please describe other actions you have taken in support of union-related initiatives:
I have written letters, made phone calls, attend rallies, stood on picket lines, and sponsored legislation in support of unions and working men and women of this city through out my tenure in the Council. I have a strong record supporting labor.

Return completed questionnaire and brief personal biography to:

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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.



John Liu 09 for Comptroller

Email: john@liunewyork.com

www.liunewyork.com

Phone: (718) 360-9393

John Liu learned early in life that strong communities can only be built with hard work, vision and leadership. As an immigrant, his parents also encouraged John and his two brothers to live by the proverb that "a rising tide lifts all boats," so their actions would always have a positive influence on their community.

John was a newcomer to politics when he was elected to the City Council in 2001, *the first Asian-American elected to legislative office in New York history*. Since then, he has proudly represented the Northeast Queens communities of Auburndale, Flushing, Fresh Meadows, Linden Hill, Queensborough Hills and Whitestone.

Experience In Government, Finance and the Community:

A Mind For Fiscal Management

Prior to being elected to the City Council in 2001, John was an actuary and worked as a manager at the financial consulting firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers. His expertise has helped the city to root out waste and mismanagement in government and to expose and correct fiscal mismanagement in city agencies like the DOT, MTA and TLC, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

A Passion for Fairness and Justice

John believes that every New Yorker deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, and he has been called on many times to speak out and act against bias and hate crimes in our City.

John has co-sponsored numerous City Council measures protecting the rights of minorities, women and members of the LGBT community; he has taken on radio and television personalities who try to exploit ethnic and racial differences in the name of "humor"; and he has denounced assaults and killings of New Yorkers because of their race or sexual orientation.

A History of Community Involvement and Leadership

John has lived in Flushing since he was five years old, and he has had the opportunity to know and work with many diverse communities in Queens and across our city.

John's lifelong commitment to serve his community and his city, embodied by his work with these organizations and on the City Council for the past eight years, are major reasons why he is embarking on this new journey to become New York City Comptroller.

John and his wife Jenny live in Flushing with their son Joey.

In his two terms in the City Council, John has had a distinguished record of achievement:

Transportation

As Chairman of the Transportation Committee, John has paid special attention to the critical role mass transit plays in our city. He has supported capital programs to upgrade subways, buses and ferries to meet increased demand and conform to higher environmental standards; sponsored laws to improve pedestrian safety and initiate public works projects improving traffic flow and relieving congested streets, bridges and tunnels; and developed programs to bring yellow taxicab service to areas outside of Manhattan.

John conducts extensive legislative oversight over the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Taxi & Limousine Commission (TLC), finding and eliminating waste and mismanagement in these agencies. His leadership has resulted in long-term changes to make getting around our City easier for working New Yorkers and for people with disabilities.

Education

John strongly believes that a quality education is the key to the future of our city. He is proud to be a product of New York City public schools and is committed to common sense education reform that doesn't shortchange our kids or exclude teachers, parents and students from the decision-making process.

As a member of the City Council's Committee on Education, John has called for a reassessment of standardized testing and the role it plays in determining our kids' grades; supported investing millions of dollars in infrastructure improvements and high-tech upgrades to our schools; sponsored legislation to make schools safer for our kids; and demanded that city schools get a fair share of education funding.

John Liu serves on the following City Council Committees:

Transportation (Chairperson), Consumer Affairs, Contracts, Education, Health, Land Use, Landmarks, Public Siting & Maritime Uses, Lower Manhattan Redevelopment, Oversight and Investigations