



Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Candidate Questionnaire - 2022 Primary

Dear Denny Salas,
Congratulations on your decision to run for a seat on the New York Legislature! Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serve the public. In the following pages, you will find questions regarding your positions on various reform issues and your plans for office. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for office, and to issue our preference for the June primary. Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

**

If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by March 16.

If you seek our support, we will need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. Given time constraints and the limited capacity of a member-based organization, we may not be able to evaluate all contests or candidates in this election cycle.

**

If you cannot complete the questionnaire in one sitting, you can click Save at the bottom of every page.

Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with your responses. Citizens Union will not be able to see your answers unless you submit the form. We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).

For any questions, please email candidates@citizensunion.org

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Name

Denny Salas

Office Sought (New York State)

Assembly

District Number

65

In which primary

Democratic

What party line/s are you running under?

Democratic

If elected, which legislative conference will you join (e.g., Democrat, Republican, other)?

Democratic

Age

39

Education

College

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

I was a county committee member in district 65; a former City Council district one candidate; a pro-housing & pro-affordable housing advocate (numerous OpEds), a pedestrian-friendly city advocate (I sit on Transportation Alternative's Manhattan Committee where I wrote their policy platform on fixing Canal Street); a community volunteer with several food drives in Lower Manhattan, not including the annual Turkey Drive I created feeding over 600 families in NYCHA over the last two years; and all-around good guy.

Website

dennysa
las.com

Twitter [@realdennysalas](#)

Facebook IG: [@realdennysalas](#)

AFFIRMATIONS

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?

Yes

Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?

Yes

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union preferences and endorsements)

Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dennis Salas". The signature is stylized with a large "D" and "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

ETHICS

Do you support replacing Joint Commission on Public Ethics with an effective and independent enforcement body, whose members are not appointed directly by elected officials?

Yes

Do you support the new independent ethics oversight agency to also replace the Legislative Ethics Commission (LEC)?

Yes

Do you support allowing the new ethics body to investigate misconduct more effectively by simplifying its voting rules, giving it the authority to subpoena testimony and documents, empowering it to suspend or terminate public officials (not elected officials), and increasing its transparency?

Yes

Do you support significantly limiting outside compensation earned by state legislators and eliminate stipends, while increasing their pay?

Yes

Do you hold financial interest or serve as an officer on an entity that receives funding from the state? If you do, how will you manage this conflict of interest?

N/A

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

N/A

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

Election Administration

How would you use your power as a legislator to improve election administration in New York? Feel free to add any policy proposals you support in regards to reforming the BOE.

I would write legislation to reform the Board of Elections to make it far more effective and responsive to the needs of our city by proposing the following:

- Streamline operations by reducing the number of commissioners to four & not requiring each commissioner to be tied to a specific geographical location to remove any political favoritism and ensure equal distribution of resources to counties to carry out elections effectively.
- The New York City Council usually picks board commissioners based on a patronage system rather than merits. That should stop. The council should hold transparent and thorough hearings on any nominee to vet their qualifications for the role thoroughly.
- Require commissioners to conduct an exhaustive search for top executive staff rather than the current system of handing out cushy jobs to political friends and supporters.
- Mandate commissioners and election staff to undergo annual training of current election laws to create an environment for voters that exudes confidence in the administration of elections. We have seen long lines at voting booths and, at times, voting sites not ADA accessible and unfriendly to citizens who need a bit more help. Constant training can alleviate these issues.
- Allow the city council to remove commissioners for poor performance and administration of elections.

Do you support removing the constitutional requirement in election administration that empowers the two major political parties to nominate and effectively control election boards?

Yes

Do you support reducing the party-based hiring in boards of elections to the minimum currently required by the constitution?

Yes

Do you support implementing an open, competitive, merit-based hiring process for all election administration staff and certain functions at polls?

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions.
[I may have covered the drop-down questions in my previous response.](#)

Voting Rights

Do you support re-passing the constitutional amendment to enact same-day voter registration, and putting it on the ballot in 2024?

Yes

Do you support re-passing the constitutional amendment to enact no-excuse absentee voting, and putting it on the ballot in 2024?

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

Open and Competitive Elections

Do you support easing access to the ballot for parties and independent candidates, by returning to the pre-2020 voting and signature thresholds? That includes reducing the voting threshold to become a registered party back to 50,000 votes in a gubernatorial election, and the petition requirement for independent candidates back to 15,000 signatures.

Yes

Do you support reforming the process of filling vacancies in the state legislature by implementing nonpartisan special elections or holding a primary election at least thirty days in advance of the special election?

Yes

Who do you think should draw new district maps every decade in New York? (e.g., the current Independent Redistricting Commission, the Legislature/LATFOR, a new body)

This process should be apolitical and disconnected from the legislature. The Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) looked like they created fair maps that would ensure proper representation, but the final product was undoubtedly partisan.

Unfortunately, with partisan lines, it breeds a stagnant society unable to accept or hear new ways of thinking and keeps power in the hands of gatekeepers. For that reason, I believe an empowered IRC whose maps become the final product is the way forward.

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Do you support further reducing campaign contribution limits?

Yes

Do you support setting even lower contribution limits for registered lobbyists and those who do business with the state?

Yes

Starting from the next election cycle, New York will have a public campaign finance program, offering matching funds on small donations for candidates who opt in. If you decide to run again in the next election, do you intend to participate in the program?

Yes

Do you support moving the campaign finance matching program to be administered by an independent, nonpartisan body outside of the State Board of Election?

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

I agree with reducing limits on individual contributions and having an independent body outside the board of elections to administer and oversee the public matching program.

COURT REFORM

Do you support simplifying and consolidating New York State's court system - which includes 11 trial courts - by passing the Chief Judge's proposed constitutional amendment to modernize the courts?

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

I like the idea of consolidating the 11 trial courts to one or two and lessening the need for a massive bureaucracy, but I would reduce the review time from ten years to five years. If the consolidation process doesn't work, I would like immediate fixes to be implemented before any bad habits become too entrenched and inflexible to change.

GOALS, PLANS, AND REPRESENTATION

What are the top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected? Feel free to reference an answer above rather than restate it.

First: Private/Public Afterschool Programs: We live in New York and have access to the most extensive breadth of industries. Our state has professions ranging from world-class educational institutions, research, development, fashion, finance, technology, media, advertising, real estate, culinary arts, and performance arts. The list goes on and on. Yet, we fail to access these industries to provide our students with career pathways. It is a failure of imagination and leadership on our part, and it stops now. I propose creating new afterschool programs beginning in elementary school and going through high school to develop real-world skills for our state's students. Hence, they have a pathway to a fruitful and long-last career. These new programs will be designed using the professional expertise of our state's various industries and be taught by professionals within the respective industries. The benefits would be twofold: • Our students, especially in some of our lower-socioeconomic areas, will be exposed to professions that they never thought possible and be prepared by developing relationships and mentors that will guide them to achieve their dream of working in any occupation that they seek. • Employers will have access to a homegrown talent pool and ensure that they do not experience a shortage of talent for future job openings that they will seek to fulfill.

Second: A New Mitchell-Lama Program: The Mitchell-Lama Program was established in 1955 and spurred an incredible surge in New York homeownership for working and middle-class families. According to a Mitchell-Lama report, from the beginning of the program to its end in 1978, nearly 140,000 apartments were built for everyday New Yorkers. This program was successful for working and middle-class families looking to live and grow their families in New York. But now, millennials are left struggling to meet their rent demands or have to move farther and farther away from the city because they can't afford to live here. The dream of starting a family in the city they love is beyond their reach. An Urban Institute study found that "Millennials are less likely to be homeowners than baby boomers and Gen Xers. The homeownership rate among millennials ages 25 to 34 is eight percentage points lower than baby boomers and 8.4 percentage points lower than Gen Xers in the same age group." The study also indicated that: * Increasing education debt has reduced millennials' likelihood of owning a home, as debt rises their debt-to-income ratios and lowers their remaining income to save for a down payment. * High rental costs make it difficult for millennials to save for a down payment. * Obtaining a mortgage has become more challenging since the housing market crisis because of an unstable labor market and tightening credit standards. The supply of affordable housing has declined over the past decade, especially in areas where millennials prefer living. Establishing a new Mitchell-Lama for this generation of middle-class Americans, who are more educated than any generation before them, will enhance the possibilities for the future of New York City. My program would allow couples with a combined annual income of \$350,000 or less to attain homeownership in New York. This program will establish new and exciting co-op developments that provide an economic opportunity to generate wealth and income mobility for a generation that's been battered by the Financial Crisis and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third: Wage Subsidies: Eighty-nine percent of the more than 200,000 businesses in New York City employ fewer than 20 people. To revive our economy, we need to assist those small businesses as we continue to fight COVID-19 and the destruction it has left in its wake. To that end, the City Council should pass legislation offering small businesses wage subsidies to retain and hire new workers. For small businesses with annual revenues between \$0 – \$200,000, the city would subsidize an additional \$10 per hour salary per employee. There would be a sliding scale towards eliminating the subsidy for companies that make between \$200,001 – \$500,000 in revenues. This program will provide a short-term stabilizing boost to its most vulnerable workers and businesses while creating a pathway toward the long-term economic stability and equity that our city deserves.

If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to introduce? If you are an incumbent, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to pass?

My Private/Public Afterschool Program

In providing constituent service, what are the major needs of your district's constituents and how will you meet them?

Public Safety/Anti-Asian/Anti-Semitic Attacks

- My district has a large Asian & Jewish (my wife is Jewish) population that feel like they're under siege by physical attacks and verbal harassment while living their everyday life. The fear is palpable among our district, and rightfully so. We must look at avenues to mandate the creation of a Hate Crimes Unit embedded in every police department across our state, but also have active prosecution of hate crimes where we have seen the D.A.'s office (in our city and elsewhere) pass on charging individuals with hate crimes even where there was evident intent to target a racial/religious group.

- I will propose funding for statewide hate crime units and a mandated review and quarterly reports from district attorney offices of cases deemed possible for a hate crime where the D.A.'s office chose not to prosecute and why. From there, we can propose stronger legislation to force D.A.'s to do their job.

- I will propose legislation that studies police response times in a wealthy community vs. a working-class community that will punish local precincts who are not doing their job responding to emergency calls. There is plenty of evidence that if you live in a poorer neighborhood, law enforcement is not as responsive, and this needs to stop.

Stop the Concentration of Social Projects in Working-Class Communities

- Our Chinatown community is inundated with six homeless shelters (with two more being proposed) and a borough-based jail. This is a manifestation of structural racism. When you look at the distribution of shelters, they are primarily located in working-class neighborhoods. You do not see a fair share of them in the wealthiest areas in this city. This is not NIMBYism (I am most certainly a YIMBY), but instead, a case of our local government purposely choosing working-class communities to house shelter and jail projects than locating them in other/wealthier neighborhoods.

- I will use my voice to block any new shelter projects in my primarily (61.1% majority-minority) working-class district. Additionally, I will write legislation to study and paint an accurate picture of how lower-income communities are asked to bear the burden of housing shelters and other government projects than wealthier communities. It's time that they do their part to fix our societal issues.

A Transparent NYCHA

- Frankly, our community does not believe a single word that comes out of NYCHA. Our neighbors and NYCHA residents are fed up with this entity for the lack of services, response, and accountability.

- I will write legislation that compels the housing authority to issue quarterly reports (like a company trading on the stock exchange) that lays out its revenue and expenditures to every resident and includes the same information for their building. For example, if you live at 230 Clinton Street (LaGuardia), you will see what issues your building had during the quarter and how much money was spent to alleviate the problem.

- From there, we can ascertain the fundamental needs for NYCHA. We have become accustomed to repeating a \$40 Billion figure estimated from one single report and not from NYCHA (who has happily gone along with that figure).

What experience have you had, if any, with good government and reform issues? (e.g. voting and elections, campaign finance, ethics, government transparency and oversight, police accountability). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

N/A

How long have you lived in the district in which you are running?

7.5 years, and my wife and I are pregnant with our first child which we will raise here.

Have you lived in the district before this year's redistricting?

Yes, same amount of time. Redistricting did not affect me.

For incumbents: If your district has changed significantly following this year's redistricting, how do you intend to run your office to serve the needs of the new constituents you now represent?

N/A

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race), and what is your plan to achieve that number?

6,500 - 7,000 votes.

We have an aggressive outreach strategy to promote our message and increase visibility. After the first week of petitioning, we acquired 800 signatures, and after two weeks, we are nearly at 1,500.

We will continue doing that throughout the district and send out a "Dear Neighbor" letter and continue having conversations with community leaders and voters across our district.

If I had a map in front of you - hopefully we can during our interview - I will get into greater detail about our pathway to victory.

The district is 36.9% Asian, 18.1% Latino, 6.7% Black.

What are your current fundraising numbers, if different than the last campaign finance filing?

\$15,000 after 2.5 weeks of entering the race.

How many individual donors do you have?

37

Please indicate any endorsements that your campaign has received, if applicable (you can also share a link to a list of endorsements)

United Democratic Organization - The only/largest political club in Chinatown that successfully ran Yuh-Line Niou's first campaign for assembly. It was also her only endorsement during the campaign.

Justin Yu - Dubbed the "Mayor of Chinatown," has been a long-time community member and two-time president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. A well-known community services organization in Chinatown.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Please feel free to attach any additional information such as resume, campaign brochures, or issues statements.

BIO: My name is Denny Salas, and as a proud first-generation American, husband, & father-to-be, my immigrant story is like many New Yorkers: I grew up in poverty, we collected cans to turn in for money, and in a case of arson, we almost lost our lives when someone lit our house on fire while my family and I were inside.

Despite those challenges, I believe the American Dream is alive and for everyone.

PUBLIC SAFETY: Statewide Mandate for AAPI, Black, Latino, Jewish, & LGBTQ Hate Crimes Taskforce Embedded in Every Police Department, Empower Violence Interrupters, Fund Summer Youth Employment Programs, End Concentration of Jails/Homeless Shelters in Working-Class Communities, Utilize Kendra's Law, & Effective/Tough Law Enforcement.

EDUCATION: Increase Number of Specialized High Schools, Expand Gifted & Talented Programs to Every Middle/High School, Expand High-Quality Schools (whether Public, Private, Specialized, or Charter), Improve Partnerships between High & Low Performing Schools, & Create Private/Public After-school Programs to Improve Career Success for our Students.

ECONOMY: Higher Wages, Expand Union Jobs, Create Statewide PPP Program to Support Small Businesses, Expand Export Grants for Businesses, Subsidize Small Business Wages to Increase Employment, Increase Business Grants for MWBE & Traditionally Disenfranchised Localities, & Support Expansion of Pedestrian-Friendly Communities.

HOUSING: A new Mitchell-Lama Program to attain Homeownership, Maintain & Increase Affordable Housing by Supporting Community Land Trusts, Funding NYCHA & Empowering Residents w/Transparency & Accountability, Increasing Tax Credits for Deeper Affordability.

www.dennysalas.com @realdennysalas

*** ELECT ***
DEMOCRAT
DENNY SALAS
FOR STATE ASSEMBLY
薩賚思
VOTE!
JUNE 28TH

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

My name is Denny Salas, & as a proud first-generation American, husband, & father-to-be, my immigrant story is like many New Yorkers: I grew up in poverty, we collected cans for money, & in a case of arson, we almost lost our lives when someone lit our house on fire while my family & I were inside.

Despite those challenges, I believe the American Dream is alive & for everyone.

Please review your answers by clicking **PREVIEW ANSWERS** below. You can submit the questionnaire at the bottom of the preview page by clicking **SUBMIT**. Once you click **SUBMIT**, you will receive a confirmation email with a PDF file containing your responses. If you don't see the email, please check your spam box.

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