

## Candidate Questionnaire

Dear Candidate,

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](#).

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**If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by June 27, 2022.**

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.

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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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

We thank you very much for your response.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Name

Nomiki Konst

### Office Sought (New York State)

Senate

### District Number

59

### 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

38

### Education

College

### Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Public Advocate 2019

Website [nomikiforny.com](http://nomikiforny.com)

Twitter [@nomikikonst](https://twitter.com/nomikikonst)

Facebook [nomikikonst](https://www.facebook.com/nomikikonst)

## 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, consisting of stylized, overlapping lines that form a name, possibly starting with 'A' and 'M'.

# ETHICS

**What is your opinion on the recently passed ethics reform, which replaced JCOPE with a new ethics oversight agency called Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government? Did you support this policy?**

Groups like Citizens Union and leaders like Senator Biaggi have done a great job investigating our state's ethics issues and violations. We need to expand the funding we use to investigate and follow up on these ethical issues. There is no way we have found and eliminated all sexual harassment and financial compromises that the state legislature or any independent entities have. As a state where the IDC, in its own corrupt way, was in power for so long - we have the duty to go beyond just fixing the service level issues. We need to anticipate the loopholes special interests will use to lobby, influence and block even after we pass new reforms.

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

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?**

No I do not

**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 ethics issues.**

I would introduce increasing legislative staff budgets, as well, so staff is receiving decent wages. Too often staff budgets are spread thin, leading to unpaid or underpaid interns and potentially opening up situations in which paid staff may be working outside their legislative jobs.

# 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.**

Every year we hear horrific stories of voter purges, test ballots being tabulated, long lines, absentee ballot rejections and paper ballots being compromised within machines based on outside elements like - rain! There is no reason one of the wealthiest states in the country that has a legacy of progress and reform, should continue to have a broken BOE. If we were another country, our own government would be calling our process out.

First, we need to learn from other states and have legislative hearings with electoral reform experts. For instance we know that certain ballot machines have had major glitches and have questions of being compromised in other states. Worse, one of the largest manufacturers have conservative political ties, which clearly seems to be a conflict. We lack the stringent federal standards for these machines, putting them at risk of hacking. If we do use touch screen machines, we need a paper ballot as a backup for auditing.

But the root of reforming the BOE is the way it is structured. Instead of having independent, election experts serving at the BOE, we have political appointees whose vetting is not transparent to the public and with no oversight.

To have true structural reform, the legislature would have to prioritize overhauling the agency, creating a ballot measure. In the meantime, there should be more training for staff and poll workers, an open hiring process where jobs are listed and available to the public, and just overall, more transparency. Perhaps this can begin with quarterly reports being submitted to the legislature on their training and hiring processes and reporting on metrics of improvement.

**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.

## **Voting Rights**

**Do you support re-passing the constitutional amendment to enact same-day voter registration?**

Yes

**Do you support re-passing the constitutional amendment to enact no-excuse absentee voting?**

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)**

There are new data and computer based programs that have been shown to be able to draw districts. We should use that as a first draft tool and then check to see that it has protected our diverse communities and undeserved ones. But it has been shown that these programs do work. After these are drawn we should then have cultural and anthropologist experts (appointed by the state senate) take a look to make sure these are designed in ways that don't give certain districts disproportional power and are conscious of communities. Having 1-3 versions from this process and then have the legislature vote between them.

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 also hope we have hearings to discuss how the campaign finance matching program can be improved based on accessing NYC's system. I would encourage the body to be comprised of experts on campaign finance, auditing and good government. I served on the 21 member Unity Reform Commission from 2017-2018, which dealt with issues related to electoral reforms, auditing of finances, accessing conflict-of-interests, committee and staffing appointments.



# 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.

# 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: New York Health act and pandemic economic response plan

Second: Strngthening our Reproductive Justice Laws

Third: Stronger Gun Control Protections

**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?**

For too long lawmakers have been behind the curve when it comes to understanding technology. By the time we as a society see the effects of how technology is impacting our lives, the government is often frozen with confusion in how to address any crises related to tech. As someone whose media company exists on many platforms, I have been personally affected by and seen others affected by the radicalization many of these platforms have facilitated. Tech platforms are compromising elections - not just the big Facebook Cambridge Analytica story, but companies' platforms are playing off each other. Facebook is where communities are organized, Twitter is where ideas are discussed and YouTube is where ideas are introduced (of course, there are many other platforms). None of these companies are transparent with their algorithms and the data they collect; many of them incentivize conversations that are controversial, argumentative and driven by hate. When investigated internally, employees hired to do so were fired for uncovering intentional bias that drives hate but also pushes people of color and women to the bottom of the algorithms. These companies need to be taken on. I will introduce a tech-reform bill, demanding algorithms are public and restructured.

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

SD 59 has the largest public housing in the country within feet of the fastest growing city in America – one that now resembles Emerald City. Long Island City's rapid growth – and that of surrounding neighborhoods - has been enabled by outdated tax breaks which have starved the city of overdue funds. When public housing is crumbling and affordable housing is barely existent, and rents are going

up – all while developers keep getting tax breaks – we have to pause and address these crises.

We are living in a speculative market that is only serving the folks building these glitzy towers. Small businesses are hurting (especially post pandemic), rents have gone up 33% in one year, our infrastructure is being starved of resources. We need to reign in on these tax breaks (whatever comes after 421a) and pass pied-de-terre tax legislation. Otherwise, the buses and subways will continue to not run on time, schools will continue to be underfunded, parks will be poorly maintained, mental health won't be addressed – and New York will be a shell of itself.

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.

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I served as an appointee to the Unity Reform Commission, on the committee to reform the national Democratic party. There I combed through campaign finance filings to report where the party's finances were being spent, as the party did not have a process of reporting or auditing to its committee members. I pushed for conflicts of interests bans in membership and the elimination of appointees to the rules committee which overrules the entire DNC membership. I suggested and advocated major electoral reform – mostly targeted at NY - calling for same day registration, early voting and merged primary dates (which was legislatively achieved).

As an investigative reporter I have worked to expose and find many instances of government corruption over the years, including focusing much of my reporting work on the IDC from 2016-2018. Currently I am finishing a 4.5 year long documentary on disaster capitalism in Puerto Rico, which centers around how certain tax policies, government contracts and a unique legal status has created a confluence of crises that is pushing locals out of their homes.

**Do you currently live in this district? How long have you lived in it?**

Yes, for almost 8 years in Astoria and previously on the Lower East Side

**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?**

# 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?**

8,000 - We will wage a vigorous and dynamic campaign.

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

We expect to file on July 15th with \$100,000 raised.

**How many individual donors do you have?**

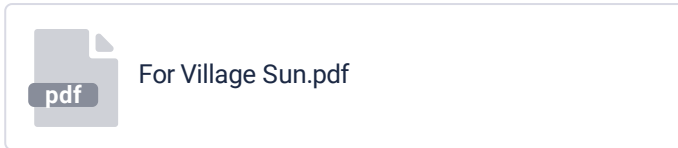
We expect to file with over 750 individual donors.

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

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LT8USNTXwK7LxSY4mcEyHBn\\_rLJcedURNTdT0jID13E/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LT8USNTXwK7LxSY4mcEyHBn_rLJcedURNTdT0jID13E/edit?usp=sharing)

# ADDITIONAL INFO

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



## What else would you like us to know about yourself?

I appreciate the work of Citizens Union in advocating for good government reform in a state that has a legacy for pushing reforms and progress. I believe NY should be the model for good government, but sadly our reputation in recent years has been the opposite. It's because of your great work at Citizens Union and the Gotham Gazette many reforms are discussed and introduced. We have an extraordinary opportunity right now with a new Albany to address a backlog of reforms that are well overdue. I look forward to working with Citizens Union while I'm in the Senate, to help us craft the most progressive reforms in the country.

**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.**

If you have any further questions, you may contact us

at [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

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