

POLITICAL ACTION FOR CANDIDATE ELECTION (PACE)

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CITY WIDE CANDIDATE FORUM 2009

Candidate's name: **Alex Zablocki**

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Office Sought: **Public Advocate** Party Affiliation: **Republican (does it matter)**

Name and title of person completing this form: **Alex Zablocki/Candidate**

1. What principles and priorities would you apply during this period of budgetary constraints?

The last budget you want to cut during hard economic times is our education and our police budgets.

Firstly, education is one of the most important items to fund in a budget. I view education funding as an investment for tax payers, not a cost. Cut backs in education funding which could affect children in the classroom can harm an entire generation of New Yorkers. For this reason, the education budget should be maintained, if not increased. My position is also true for higher public education, such as funding for CUNY and SUNY. Both CUNY and SUNY provide an excellent college education at the fraction of the cost of a public university. As funding for both of these institutions are cut, CUNY/SUNY will pass the cuts to students in the form of tuition increases. This comes at a time when enrollment for CUNY is soaring because the bad economy is forcing the

unemployed workforce back to the classroom to be educated in new fields. As a CUNY graduate who was hit with a tuition increase while attending Baruch College a few years ago, I know how difficult it can be to pay for college, especially when costs are rising. For this reason, I announced a plan, which I suggest to CUNY Chancellor Goldstein, to institute a “Tuition Lock” program, which would spare full-time students who are already enrolled in CUNY from having to pay higher tuition costs because of budget shortfalls. “Tuition Lock” would keep countless students in the classroom and continue the mission of CUNY to provide an excellent higher level public education at affordable rates.

Secondly, cutting the police budget during times when the economy is in recession is proven to lead to higher crime rates in our communities. It happened in the 1970’s and it happened again in the early 1990’s. We have to understand that we need to keep police on the streets to fight petty quality of life crimes that lead to a decrease in the quality of life of all residents.

As Public Advocate, I would advocate to protect both of these budgets.

2. If you are elected what would you do to protect the non-profit organizations, their staff, and clients from funding delays and the resulting breaks in service, and to assure that program goals and quality are protected?

If a non-profit program is vital to residents (physical and mental health) and that program relies on public funding, then a system should be in place to ensure lack of funding does not end or interrupted around budget time or because of bureaucracy. For these types of programs, I have suggested in the past that the City Council devise a plan, along with the Comptroller, to “fast track” funding to non-profit organizations that receive appropriations from city government. For certain services and/or organizations, a zero-interest bridge loan program may be another option to help avoid any loss in services and ensure program goals and quality are protected. Of course any program would have to be accountable to taxpayers.

3. How do you propose helping the middle class stay in NYC and what barriers do you see?

In order to help the middle class stay in New York City, our state and city government has to stop nickel-and-diming residents that live and work here. This year, our state legislature passed a historic budget, increasing spending by nearly 10% over last year, while raising fees and taxes to pay for it. To keep the middle class living and working in New York City we must: support small business owners, including artists and freelancers; keep crime rates low; continue to fund our education system and strive for high standards; improve and invest in mass transit, especially in the outer boroughs; diversify our economy by offering economic incentives to industry’s that could thrive here, outside of Wall Street related jobs; and keep taxes low as well as reducing property taxes. As Public Advocate, I would support all of these points.

4. How would you improve our criminal justice system?

As Public Advocate, I would have little jurisdiction over the criminal justice system. I would, however, seek to work with the non-profit sector to help more non-violent criminals get an education while in jail and work on community release work and education programs across the city. Our jails need reform – real reform – and we shouldn't be locking criminals up and throwing away the key until their release date. Society would be better off investing resources to help turn the lives of criminals around so they can be more productive members of society when they are released.

5. What is your opinion of Mayoral control in our school system? What role do you think parents should have? How would you prioritize the role of social workers?

Graduation rates and test scores have been rising and it proves Mayoral control over our school system works. No system is perfect and with the next form of Mayoral control of schools, we need to reform some parts.

Parents should have school choice, whether it be through charter schools or experimenting with school vouchers for certain communities across New York City. I believe parents should also have a say in how schools are run and play more of a role in the daily life of students in schools. Parental input is currently lacking and it needs to be part of the next Mayoral control authorization bill.

Social workers are an important component of our school system, especially when it comes to special education students. Social workers would know best how to handle and place students that have special needs, not a government bureaucrat. Social workers should have a seat at the table, as parents and education professionals should as well. Social workers should also be educated and equipped with resources to help recognize signs of suicidal and depressed students, especially in high schools.

6. How would you ensure quality health care to people who are under insured and uninsured? NYC public hospitals were at one time on the cutting edge of care. After decades of funding cuts, the quality of care has suffered. What steps would you advocate to return our city hospitals to a higher level of care? How would you prioritize the role of social workers in this setting?

While serving as District Director to State Senator Andrew Lanza, I worked on securing funding for the first free cardiac care clinic on Staten Island. This clinic is free to insured and underinsured individuals who have no where else to turn for cardiac checkups, including a costly, mandated test to enter or retire the police force. As a Staten Island resident, I know first hand how our health care system in the borough is deteriorating. Staten Island doesn't have one HHC hospital and only receives less than 1% of HHC's budget – meanwhile Staten Island is the fastest growing county in New York State and home to nearly 500,000 people. Queens is

now facing closing hospitals and many private hospitals are struggling to survive across the city, especially after Medicaid reimbursement rates were cut earlier this year.

HHC needs more funding by the city and state and funds must spend better and allocated for preventative care in the five boroughs. HHC should also work with city and state government to devise a grant and low interest program for private hospitals and primary care physicians.

Social workers play an important part in our public hospital system. In many communities across the city, this important component is missing. HHC currently funds few mobile units (for physical and mental health) and as Public Advocate, I would advocate for the funding of more mobile health care units and a mobile social worker network that would be de-centralized and closer to the communities they could serve.

As District Director for State Senator Andrew Lanza I also helped form the Mayor's Task Force on Suicide Prevention along with the Staten Island Mental Health Society, on Staten Island. One of the first accomplishments of the task force was getting the MTA to install suicide prevention phones on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. The task force was born out of an increase in suicides among residents in the borough, especially young people. As Public Advocate, I would like to expand this task force to the other four boroughs and work with social workers, schools and senior centers to prevent suicide among the most vulnerable people.

7. The student loan forgiveness program for master level social workers, who work in critical human services specialty areas in which there are staffing shortages, including gerontology, mental health, substance abuse, child welfare, domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, is now funded at \$2 million. Would you support raising the appropriation to encourage social workers to work in these critical areas?

Yes.

8. Would you be willing to create scholarships or loan forgiveness to support the recruitment of bi-lingual social workers, social workers of color and social workers into critical fields such as gerontology, child welfare, etc.?

As Public Advocate, I couldn't create scholarships or loan forgiveness programs in this regard, but it is something that I would support as long as there was a need in the industry for these positions. As Public Advocate, I would seek to work with the NASW to form a Charter School for Social Workers, educating your next generation of social workers, with an emphasis on certain fields in social working and foreign language.

9. What is your position on protecting a woman's right to reproductive choice?

I am pro-life. Life is a beautiful thing and our government needs to do more to prevent unwanted pregnancy, especially among young people, and make adopting more affordable and open to more families, including same sex couples.

10. What is your position regarding same sex marriage?

I fully support equality and support same sex marriage. This July my campaign will attempt to create a new ballot line called “The Equality Party” which I plan on using to make the public more aware of this very important issue. New York State must take action and legalize same sex marriage. As Public Advocate I would work with the State legislature to this end.

11. What is your position on services for undocumented immigrants in New York City?

My family immigrated here many generations ago, legally, with no money and a dream. Our country, and especially our city, was built by immigrants – that is what is so special about New York. With that said, too many New Yorker’s live here illegally. Elected officials have to be compassionate to this population and a solution must come from the Federal government to help legalize citizenship for immigrant families living in the United States.

Undocumented immigrants shouldn’t be afraid to ask for services if they need it, especially health care. I don’t believe we should be a welfare society but we have an obligation to help our neighbor, regardless of who they are, where they are from or how they got here. Undocumented immigrants are contributing members to our city and they want nothing more than to become US citizens. There needs to be a better way to reach out to immigrant communities and allow them to utilize services without fear of deportation or criminalization. As Public Advocate, I would ask the City Council and the Mayor to setup hearings on this very important issue, along with the federal government, to come up with solutions to this problem. Immigration reform should start right here in New York where millions of American families immigrated to generations ago.

12. In light of the current focus on serious ethical lapses among elected officials at all levels of government, what is your position on strengthening ethical standards?

One of the reasons I am running for Public Advocate is the fact that we need more accountability in government. It is also one of the main points in my platform. Elected officials should be held to the highest standards. As Public Advocate, I would propose an independent body to devise a program for elected officials, agency heads and employee’s to take to ensure that these officials know what ethical standards they must uphold and what the public is expecting of them (similar to continuing education credits). I believe that the oath taken once elected is not enough to ensure that all officials will perform their duties ethically.

6/22/09