

Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2020 Federal Candidate Questionnaire

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Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability:

1) Why do you seek an endorsement from CBID?

It is imperative that the people of Brooklyn are represented by someone who understands the nuts and bolts of how our government works. I have been a member of Congress since 2006 and I am currently serving as the only black woman in the New York delegation. I have dedicated my life to the noble and necessary pursuit in a democracy: public service. During my time in office, I have made numerous strides to improve the lives of Americans, with a specific focus on introducing progressive policies that will positively impact the district where I was born and raised. Through my unceasing and tireless work to advance progressive and liberating agendas that address the issue of affordable housing, comprehensive immigration reform, women's rights, healthcare, education and climate change and economic opportunity, I'm fighting for our future. I am determined to create an America where all people can live in dignity and have the opportunity to flourish, while simultaneously shining light on the racist, xenophobia, and cruel underhanded tactics of our adversaries on the other side of the aisle. I believe my ideologies are in line with what CBID values and I would be honored to receive your endorsement.

2) If elected, what would be your top legislative priority in your first term?

My priority in the 117th Congress will remain on the most pressing issue facing constituents in my district: affordable housing. In one of the most expensive cities in the world, finding affordable housing is often the difference between success and failure in life. We cannot expect homeless children to perform well in school if they do not know where they will sleep that night. We cannot expect working class people to make the investments in themselves if all of their income goes to rent every month. Developers continue to build luxury apartments that go unsold and unrented, while many people deal with housing insecurity or homelessness.

Last year, I introduced the Affordable Housing and Area Median Income Fairness Act to directly tackle the challenges faced by the rent burdened in my district. This bill will immediately lower the rents paid by those receiving government assistance using technical fixes and by removing Westchester and Rockland counties from the AMI calculation for Brooklyn. To address the existing real estate imbalance, the bill will also invest over \$75 billion in the construction of new affordable housing units in the tightest real estate markets in the country. It is my aim that this bill will reinvigorate the federal government's role in the housing market and improve the financial conditions for renters throughout Brooklyn.

3) Do you support the right of a pregnant person to choose to terminate their pregnancy? Have you always? If

not, please explain why your position has changed.

I have always been and always will be a proud supporter of a woman's right to choose and protecting Roe v. Wade by any means necessary. I am also a proud supporter and advocate for Planned Parenthood and understand the essential role it plays in our communities.

4) With Roe v. Wade at risk, do you plan to ensure adequate funding and legal protection to guarantee the right to accessible abortion and health services? If so, what actions will you take?

We will need to be creative as the attacks against Roe v. Wade continue to expand and we can no longer count on the Supreme Court to uphold precedent or the rights of women. Thanks to Virginia, one clear option we have is to wholeheartedly fight for the Equal Rights Amendment. It is unclear how the Supreme Court will decide when it ultimately comes before them, but we need to act proactively to clear their path. At the very least, passing legislation which clarifies that delayed ratification does not invalidate prior ratification will make it more difficult for the Supreme Court to vote in opposition of the clearly stated will of the public.

5) What is your position on the building of new oil or gas projects? What is your vision for expanding the nation's supply and transmission of renewable energy?

In order to meet the goals set forth in the Paris Climate Agreement, we not only need to suspend the construction of all new oil and gas projects but we must also implement the Green New Deal. Building a climate conscious economy requires infrastructure, and a lot of it. Everything from a smart electric grid, to windmills, to renewable energy transmission systems will need to be constructed in order to support a climate conscious economy. Before we can do that, we will need to support the training and retraining of millions of workers across the country to make sure that every community benefits from the effort. Investments in all manner of schooling, from K-12 education to community colleges and more, will be a prerequisite to developing the workforce we will need to maintain our status in the global economy. Attempting to do any of these things in a vacuum will likely sap any political will we collectively have to get it done. As such, we must take this opportunity to pass the Green New Deal as soon as possible.

6) What health care reforms or plans do you support?

I am a proud supporter of Medicare for All to ensure that every American has the healthcare they need as well as bending the cost curve to limit the financial burden we all share. With that said, I remain a disciple of the Obama School of Politics which emphasizes the motto better is good. While I believe a Medicare for All system would ultimately provide the best healthcare solutions for my constituents, a public option will likely be the next legislative solution that can pass. Before we can convince the nation that the federal government should be principally responsible for their healthcare, we must first prove that the federal government can competently provide healthcare solutions to the public. A public option provides access to healthcare to those currently denied the opportunity and has many of the same cost-curve bending effects as a Medicare for All system. After first providing proof of concept, the public will naturally choose to migrate towards a Medicare for All system.

7) The Census determines how critical resources and political power are distributed. NYS and NYC have historically been undercounted. What action can you take to ensure that New Yorkers, and in particular, members of immigrant communities, are counted? What outreach and educational activities do you have

planned?

77% of the NY-9th District is hard to count making the census and even more critical issue for my constituents. NY is at risk of losing two Congressional seats if the undercount this year is in line with historical levels – an outcome that would have an outsized impact on the NY-9th. My office has held town halls on the importance of responding to the census and will take part in CBC efforts to raise the national profile of the census. More than anything else, we will need to hold the Census Bureau accountable for the milestones they set out in order to achieve a complete count. If they do not meet their hiring or outreach benchmarks, there is no chance we can hope to have a complete count.

8) Voter ID laws, poll taxes, and limitations on polling sites and early voting are all examples of voter suppression tactics. Do you support actions to combat voter disenfranchisement? If so, please describe.

Somehow, in the year 2020, Republicans in public office have completely forgotten our history. Somehow, in a world where we have the best living examples of the power of a single vote, they have found it acceptable to purge people from voter rolls across the country. We should be careful to so haphazardly abandon rights that generations died for. Without universal suffrage, we cannot pretend to be a democracy. We need to reinstate the preclearance provisions of the Voter Rights Act and use that as a starting point for a more holistic reevaluation of how we treat the franchise. In the long-term, we must move towards making automatic registration the national norm as well as codifying Election Day as a national holiday so that working people get a fair chance to exercise their civil rights.

9) What steps do you support to reduce gun violence in the United States?

We need to take any and all necessary measures to not only curb gun violence generally, but also more acutely to ensure our children do not live in fear in schools. I proudly cosponsored the Assault Weapons Ban of 2019 to make sure that no one can bring weapons of war into our streets or schools but this is only a first step. If we want to truly get a handle on the seemingly insurmountable plague of gun violence, we must make sure all gun sales require a background check and categorically ban all those with histories of abuse or mental illness from owning a firearm. Afterwards, with a firm handle on who can and cannot own a gun, we must establish a national registry of gun owners similar to that of drivers licenses. As a whole, this legislative package would better delineate who can own a gun and give law enforcement a fighting chance on our streets.

10) What actions do you support to protect our immigrant neighbors?

Immigrants have every right to feel at home here in America as anybody else and we need to work to make sure that the treatment they receive at the hands of the federal government reflects that fact. Enforcement of our immigration laws should focus on removing bad actors that commit serious crimes, not otherwise blameless undocumented individuals seeking to make their way in America. More concretely, we must create room for the undocumented to take part in society without the omnipresent fear of deportation, especially when that amounts to a death sentence for so many. NY's state level initiatives barring ICE from operating on certain government property takes some of the necessary steps to achieve this end – something that we should expand nationwide.

On a more immediate timetable, we also must consider the urgent needs of children entangled in the border crisis. Separating children from their families only to imprison them under unqualified and at times predatory

supervision amounts to nothing short of a human rights violation. If we continue to allow this crisis to fester without first implementing targeted solutions, we are ultimately putting the nation at risk of falling victim to a new generation of homegrown terrorists.

11) What steps do you support to reform our criminal justice system?

The First Step Act, while beneficial to the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated across the country, is little more than the name suggests. Most of Congress currently focuses their energy on the direct experience of incarcerated individuals. This is a valiant goal and an integral one if we hope to improve the quality of the criminal justice system for all. However, my focus will remain on the part of the carceral system that receives the least amount of attention compared to its importance: reintegration. The difficulty of getting a job or gaining access to the training programs necessary to find gainful employment is only magnified for the formerly incarcerated. Banning the Box, prohibiting employers from asking their employees about their incarceration history, will move us in the right direction as a nation by easing the assimilation process for returning citizens. But this alone would not fundamentally change the employment landscape for the formerly incarcerated – we also need to create the pipelines for opportunity they need to succeed. The workplace needs of this population deserve explicit study and a corresponding action plan based on what we learn. Creating a nationwide system of retraining the working public with strict provisions mandating the inclusion of the formerly incarcerated would have the greatest impact on improving the lives of the formerly incarcerated.

12) What policies do you support to ensure fairness in employment and workplace conditions, as well as strengthening and increasing access to unions?

As corporate and market power continue to consolidate in a progressively smaller number of hands, the government has an obligation to step in and level the playing field. A service-based economy driven by data does not lend itself to the same market dynamics as the past that would naturally promote competition. Instead, the dynamics of this new economy favor consolidation and monopoly making market power an even greater threat to labor fairness. Earlier this year, I proudly voted in favor of the PRO Act – the highest priority for labor groups across the country. This bill takes direct aim at Right to Work laws and increases the capacity of workers to organize to advocate for their own interests. Only measures on this scale that seek to reorient the legal framework faced by workers across the country can make a significant impact on their ability to advocate on their own behalf.

13) What would you do to ensure access to affordable and quality housing for everyone in Brooklyn and nationwide?

As previously stated, affordable housing is my top priority as one of the central challenges facing my constituents. Put plainly, the path forward demands aggressive, direct government action on behalf of those in need of affordable housing solutions. As it currently stands, the federal government cannot allocate funds towards the construction of new public housing developments meaning all construction is contracted out and thus more expensive. First and foremost, we must remove this prohibition to unleash the power of the federal government in favor of the public. The economics of affordable housing do not work for the private sector, especially in cities when they can categorically make a higher return on more expensive units. Only the federal government, free from similar profitability concerns, has the true capacity to address the affordable housing crisis.

14) What, if any, groups or types of people will you not accept campaign contributions from? If so, please note whose money you will not accept.

I understand some of my constituents' concerns about elected officials being bought and paid for by special interests. Let me assure that no contributions I receive buy my vote or my voice. Throughout my career as a public servant, I have always made decisions based on what is best for my constituents. I have one of the most progressive voting records in the house and have refused donations in the past.

15) What measures would you support to improve educational opportunities for all students in New York City? Please include how you would address the continued drop in Reading and Math scores and efforts to desegregate NYC schools.

We cannot hope to see improvements in school performance until we make the necessary investments in school infrastructure to foster success. This does not simply mean improving the physical infrastructure of our crumbling schools, it also means hiring enough teachers, paying them fairly, and treating them well enough to stay in the profession. Our nation faces a teacher shortage that will only get worse unless we make it easier for people to enter the teaching profession. Critically, this does not imply lowering the standards for who can become a teacher but rather supporting those that have chosen to dedicate their lives to our collective future. How can a teacher hope to live in Brooklyn, pay for the school supplies that do not come from the state or city, and teach 30+ students with varying levels of aptitude in a classroom designed for 20 kids? If we really want to move the needle, we need to finance the easy solutions to the obvious problems first.

Addressing the success of our children in schools requires addressing the issues they bring with them every day when they walk into the classroom as well. If over 110,000 NYC students experience homelessness, it would be unrealistic at best to expect them to be able to succeed in school. My plans for increasing the number of affordable housing units available to the public will help end homelessness and segregation by providing more housing solutions for diverse people in previously prohibited communities. This more holistic approach to education will ensure that we provide the best possible care to those in need.