

Looking to Hold City Government Accountable

The ballot for general elections on Tuesday, Nov. 3, includes choices for New York City's three city-wide offices: Mayor, Public Advocate and Comptroller.

Hamodia sent an inquiry to the Republican and Democratic candidates for Public Advocate — the office that serves as a kind of city government conscience and where frustrated citizens can “tell on” city government and turn for intervention. (See related article on duties of the public advocate.)

Brief profiles culled from the candidates' campaign web sites, and their written responses to our questions, follow.



Alex Zablocki
COURTESY OF ZABLOCKI CAMPAIGN

Alex T. Zablocki – Rep.

Home: Tottenville section of Staten Island

Education: Attended public schools. BBA in Finance and Investments, Baruch College (CUNY), 2004.

Experience:

Since 2001, small business owner (online sales and small business web site development).

Interned for then-City Councilman Andrew J. Lanza

while attending college. Hired after graduation as Lanza's Director of Land Use and represented Lanza on the mayor's Growth Management and Traffic and Transportation Task Forces.

In Nov. 2006, became Lanza's chief of staff when the councilman was elected to the state senate.

In 2007, obtained a Series 7 brokerage license; works as a financial consultant with a small brokerage firm in Brooklyn.

Also: Since 2000, Eagle Scout, and is an adult leader in the Boy Scouts of America.

Bill de Blasio – Dem.

Home: Park Slope, Brooklyn

Family: Married, two children

Education: Bachelors degree, New York University, and Masters in International and Public Affairs, Columbia



Bill de Blasio
COURTESY OF DE BLASIO CAMPAIGN

University.

Experience:

In 1989, entered politics working on David Dinkins's 1989 mayoral campaign.

Served as an aide in the Dinkins Administration.

In 1997, appointed to serve as the Regional Director for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for New York and New Jersey in the Clinton Administration.

In 1999, elected to the School Board for District 15 in Brooklyn.

In 2000, managed Hillary Rodham Clinton's successful campaign for U.S. Senate.

Four-term City Council member. Since Jan. 1, 2002, represents City Council's 39th district (Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Columbia Street, Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, Kensington, Boro Park).

Committees: General Welfare (Chair); Education; Environmental Protection; Finance; Technology in Government

Current term expires at the end of the year. [Not running for re-election in the Council because he opposed overturning of term limits law.]

Inquiry to Democrat Bill de Blasio on Sept. 30

Q: If you become Public Advocate, what issues and projects would be the most immediate priorities?

Matt Wing, de Blasio's campaign communication director: If elected, Bill's main priorities in office will include giving public-school parents a greater voice in our education system, bringing reforms to the City Planning Commission to create more input from communities on development projects and create more affordable housing, and ensuring that the City budget provides adequate resources for New Yorkers in need.

Q: Would city provision of security services for private schools (see Council bill 735-2008) and city funding for private bus contracts at yeshivas in regard to dismissal after 4:30 p.m. be among early priorities? How quickly would we see this on the Public Advocate's agenda, and how forcefully would he take them up?

On Council bill to have the city provide security services to private schools, which has been stalled in the education committee since introduction on March 12, 2008: “Bill de Blasio is proud to support this critical legislation. As Public Advocate, he will continue to work with the bill's sponsor and the chair of the education committee to build support behind this issue.”

Follow-up question: The bill already seems to have healthy support in the form of a number of sponsors. What it needs is bureaucratic CPR. Is Mr. de Blasio willing to commit to throwing the full weight and tenacity of his office behind this bill, or if not, the issue it addresses?

Bill thinks it's an incredibly

important issue and is absolutely committed to continue working on it as Public Advocate.

Follow-up question: It is clear Mr. de Blasio is expressing support for the general issue. If he becomes PA, will he be taking concrete steps aimed at moving the specific bill forward or, if deemed necessary, revising it so it could move forward? Would we see his agenda for private school security activated decisively and early in his tenure?

Bill not only supports the issue, he also supports the legislation and will continue to fight for it as Public Advocate in the future and currently in the Council to push it forward. He has always been a strong supporter of this legislation.

On bus contracts:

In terms of private bus contracts it is another area that we will continue to work on as Public Advocate.

Inquiry to Republican Alex Zablocki on Oct. 1

Q: If you become Public Advocate, what issues and projects would be the most immediate priorities?

Alex Zablocki: I would immediately call for reforming the office, as I announced in my “Plan for a Better Public Advocate's Office,” which can be found [on his campaign web site]. On day one I would appoint a representative to every borough, start decentralizing the office, placing an office in every borough and call for a Charter Revision Commission to bring forward reforms outlined in my plan for the office.

[The web site contains an extensive and detailed list of steps that include making the comptroller, rather than the public advocate, next in line to assume the mayor's office, giv-

ing the public advocate subpoena power, and making the public advocate's budget independent from the mayor and council. —Ed.]

I would immediately focus on working with all 59 Community Boards across the city to improve traffic and fight for more transit options, work with parents, teachers and the Department of Education to

to handle the volume of students of these schools serve. Therefore, they are just as important as public schools. These schools offer a choice to New Yorkers who want their children schooled in a preferred way and allow parents to make the best choice for their children's education. Schools should be about choice — it is why I support Charter Schools as well.

I believe that the city and state should offer more funding for nonpublic schools as well as services. Funding and services should be equal to public schools. I also support vouchers for parents that choose to send their children to nonpublic schools.

I did not support the passage of the payroll tax which was enacted by the New York State legislature. This new tax will now require nonpublic schools to pay more taxes just for employing teachers and will lead to an increase in tuition. It can also harm the services offered in nonpublic schools. My opponent, Bill de Blasio, supports the payroll tax. I think schools and non-profit organizations should have been exempt from this tax.

[An invitation to rebut the point about the payroll tax was extended to Mr. de Blasio, who declined through a spokesperson. De Blasio's campaign web site contains the following statement that he released in April:

“In just two months, New York City commuters will face drastic fare hikes and service cuts unless our state government solves the MTA's budget crisis,” said Councilmember Bill de Blasio. “Time is running out and Albany needs to act now. In light of these troubling circumstances, I am supporting Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver's proposal to combine a payroll tax with a toll on the East and Harlem River bridges set at two dollars, the same amount as a subway fare. “Final legislation must perma-

nently keep these tolls at the level of subway fares and the revenue generated should be used to maintain and improve outer-borough transportation services. In the past I have supported several different solutions to this problem, from reinstating the commuter tax to increasing driver registration fees.

“Now, above all, I believe Albany needs to fix this problem before straphangers across our city are left carrying the burden by themselves.” — Ed.]

Q: Specifically, do you have a position on (1) city funding for private bus contracts at nonpublic schools in cases where school dismissal is too late to utilize city-provided bus transportation, and (2) city provision of security services for private schools (see Council bill 735-2008)?

The safety of children should be a priority for our city, regardless of what type of school they go to. I fully support funding for private bus contracts at nonpublic schools, especially if dismissal is too late to utilize city-provided bus transportation. As Public Advocate I would like to look at busing issues across the board. Students in elementary school shouldn't be given a MetroCard to get to and from school. This is a tragedy waiting to happen; I think safe, reliable bus service is a right and should be afforded to all students, until the 8th grade.

Again, the safety of children should be a priority for our city, regardless of what school they go to. Security should be universal for schools, private or public, and funding should be allocated to ensure these services are provided. Unfortunately, this legislation only had the support of 16 City Council members. If I am elected Public Advocate, I would support and sponsor this legislation and push all Council members to support this important piece of legislation.



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improve our schools, and look at government as a whole for ways to make it more accountable and ... to save the taxpayers money.

Q: How familiar are you with the rights and needs of nonpublic schools? Please provide information about your stance on public/city funding for the secular portion of education and services in private schools.

For too long, nonpublic schools have been forgotten by many in government. Without nonpublic schools, our public school system would not be able