

2019 Public Advocate Candidate Questionnaire



Completed questionnaires will be public documents available on our website, so put your best foot forward. If we ultimately hold an endorsement vote in your race, your questionnaire will be circulated to our membership before the vote.

Candidate name	Ron Kim
Preferred campaign contact: name, email address, phone number (we won't publish this)	
What New York City civic and political organizations are you involved with?	a. Democratic Organization of Flushing b. Community board 7 c. 109th community board council
How long have you lived in NYC? In what neighborhoods?	Like so many residents in this city, I came to New York as an immigrant. I emigrated here with my parents at the age of 7, landing in Flushing, Queens. We lived there until high school when my parents moved us to Riverdale so I could live closer to school and have more time with them. I've been in New York ever since, only leaving for college in Hamilton, New York and the year I spent in Illinois while working with Chicago Public Schools as a part of the National Urban Fellows program.
What have you accomplished in public life that you are most proud of?	In the State Legislature, I have introduced legislation to create the first-in-the-nation Office of Financial Resilience which would work to reverse the cycle of debt under which so many New York families are living. Throughout my service as an Assembly member I have been a vocal advocate for New York's small businesses, worked to pass legislation that expands access to financing, and sought to create a fund in the 2017 State Budget to help small businesses in New York comply with increasingly burdensome regulations.
Name a current/past city elected official you admire, and tell why.	John Liu showed me back in 2002 that an Asian American immigrant from Flushing could run for political office and become a successful citywide elected official and serve all communities.
The Public Advocate (PA) does not have clearly defined powers and responsibilities, compared to other executive positions. Name one way Letitia James (or a previous PA) has been effective.	As Public Advocate, Letitia James was effective in proposing legislation and policy changes that would support small businesses and promote more employee ownership. This has been one of my priority issues as a State Assemblyman. As Public Advocate, I will build on Ms. James' work by busting the corporate trusts that hold small businesses down and fostering a new era of community and small business empowerment.
How have previous PA's missed opportunities to influence city leadership?	Letitia James has done a good job of addressing issues like lack of affordable housing, increasing gentrification and a failing NYC Housing Authority. But in my time as an elected official I have seen many elected officials, including Ms. James, focus on these injustices without recognizing that they are symptoms of the broader problem. That problem is the prioritization of corporate interests over those of everyday people. As Public Advocate, I will flip the script, ending corporate subsidies and reinvesting the funds back into our communities. I believe that if we can get to the root cause of our problems instead of nipping at the edges, we can make real substantive change for the people of New York.

NYC faces problems with no immediate or obvious solutions that require balancing needs of many stakeholders. Name one “hard problem” and describe how you’d help solve it.	Nearly every single person in New York City struggles daily from debt. In fact, borrowers from low-income neighborhoods have twice the difficulty paying back their loans compared to those in high-income communities. New Yorkers have \$35 billion of student debt alone and hundreds of thousands will never be able to pay that back. This prevents people from buying homes, starting businesses and making a better life for themselves and their families. It’s a huge problem that gets little attention from our policymakers. Those that do listen, legislate around the edges with band-aid solutions instead of addressing the core problem: That our system prioritizes corporations over people. That is why I will transform the New York City Public Advocate into the first office in the nation that focuses on debt forgiveness for everyday people struggling to pay back student loans. With me as Public Advocate, we will use eminent domain to seize the most distressed student loans from the banks and then, we will cancel them.
What are the top three issues you would focus on as PA? Have you drafted any legislative proposals?	As Public Advocate we need to reduce the debt burden holding our economy back, break up the trusts that extract wealth from our local communities and end corporate giveaways disguised as economic development. To that end I have introduced several bills/ policies in the State Assembly including: The New York Tax Justice Act, The New Yorkers financial Freedom Act and the Anti-Monetization Clause. As Public Advocate I would introduce similar legislation at the city level. I will also fight to end corporate subsidies and will use our eminent domain laws to seize the student loans from the banks that control them and work to cancel them, starting with the most distressed.
What metrics should we use to evaluate your success as PA?	I will have had a successful tenure as New York City Public Advocate, if measurable progress is made to reduce the burden on New York City’s most distressed student debtors, and if significant pressure has been placed on the Mayor and City Council to end taxpayer-funded giveaways to massive corporations.
Do you see yourself as working mostly in partnership with Mayor DeBlasio, or in opposition?	I stand with the mayor when he’s right and stand up to him when he is wrong. When he first came in, I stood with him in support of his UPK proposal and was very proud of what we accomplished in implementing that program. UPK has been a transformative initiative for the children and families of New York. However, I believe the Mayor is wrong about Amazon. Giving away three billion dollars to one of the largest corporations in the world is not the type of action I want to see from a mayor. I think this shows a prioritization of the needs of corporations over people.
What city agencies do you think are most in need of oversight from this office?	The NYC Economic Development Corporation has been giving our tax dollars to mega-corporations while ignoring the needs of everyday New Yorkers. We need to stop helping businesses that extract wealth from our local economies and make sure that NYCDEC funds go to the mom-and-pop small businesses that really need them.

What changes in powers of the PA should be made in the City Charter? What's your response to calls for elimination of the PA position?	There are some legitimate concerns of the value of this seat to NYC. That's why I want to change that by transforming the New York City Public Advocate into the first office in the nation that focuses on debt forgiveness. We in New York can offer solutions not just for our citizens but for other states and municipalities across the country. So much of the anger and divisiveness in our culture is a result of economic scarcity and fear. The Public Advocate can be a strong force for good if it is wielded by someone with a vision bold enough to make big changes in the face of overwhelming adversity.
Should the PA have subpoena power?	Yes
What is your position on Amazon HQ2? What would you do for people of Long Island City and nearby if the project goes forward?	While many other elected officials in New York signed the Mayor's letter welcoming Amazon to New York, I did not. Instead, I have been the first and most vocal critic of the Amazon HQ2 deal. Before the terms of the deal were even announced I spoke out against it, understanding that any kind of agreement would end up putting the needs of business before the community. Businesses like Amazon don't need our financial support. They have already proven that, siphoning millions from local small business owners. Elected officials don't serve businesses like Amazon, they serve the people. When 3 billion dollars in corporate subsidies are given away, that's prioritizing corporations over people. I will work to ensure that people already living here are not priced out and have access to high quality jobs with a living wage. Furthermore, I will do my best to make sure that our tax dollars are used to support the people who need it most.
PA special election is non-partisan. Do you see yourself as a Democrat, or would you consider running as a member of another party in the future?	I'm a registered Democrat but will be running on my own line which will be called People Over Corporations. For nearly fifty years our city has been represented by elected officials who put the business interests of corporations before the people of this city. By running on this line, I am letting the people of New York know that their voices will be heard and I will be their voice.
What reforms would you advocate for in the local and state Democratic party?	I believe that too many decisions are being made by county leadership. We need to increase voting rights access and let the people speak for themselves. I believe that we should make it as easy as possible for New Yorkers to vote.
What is your base of support in a citywide election? Describe the coalition that gives you a path to victory.	The campaign for Public Advocate will undoubtedly experience a crowded field. Among my opponents are several current and former elected officials including Council Members and Assembly Members. In a likely February or March Special Election, turnout will be quite low, and as such, hard to predict, but is likely to be less than 500,000. That said, our turnout model consists of a path to victory unavailable to the other candidates for a variety of reasons, including messaging, demographics, coalition, and fundraising.
How much money have you raised? What are your major sources of campaign funds? Are there any types of donors you won't accept contributions from?	We are aggressively raising funds and will close out December with approximately \$400,000-500,000. We expect to have more than \$1 Million to compete, including matching funds. We will not be accepting donations from Real Estate companies nor other corporate PACs. Our budget will be based in strategy and we will raise what is necessary to win.

What endorsements have you received from publications, elected officials, community leaders, or political organizations?	As of 12/16 we have not announced any endorsements. This upcoming week we will be announcing endorsements from Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou, Assembly Member Dan Quart, Cornell Law Professor Robert C. Hockett, Laura Hanna, Co-Founder of The Debt Collective, Neal Gorenflo, Executive Director of Sharable and Douglas Rushkoff, author and founder of Team Human.
What is one fun fact about you?	In 2006, I won the bench press contest and deemed the strongest man in Queens.

I have reviewed this questionnaire and agree that the responses set forth in this document are accurate:

Candidate Signature:  _____ Date: ____12/16/18____

You must sign this questionnaire! When complete, please e-mail your signed and scanned questionnaire to politics@newkingsdemocrats.com and info@newkingsdemocrats.com