**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Chuks Onyezia

Ward: 18th

Occupation: Attorney

Education:

I’ve had the privilege of earning degrees from Illinois flagship public university in both, The University of Illinois' MBA program with concentrations in Finance and The University of Illinois' College of Law. As for professional recognition and licensure, I hold an active license to practice law in the state of Illinois with active bar membership in good standing. In addition to these accomplishments, my technical background consists of a Bachelors of Science Degree in Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Mathematics from The University of Illinois. I feel that all my experience will be helpful in the office of alderman of the 18th ward.

Previous political and civic experience:

* The Neighbor local community newspaper (www.theneighbor60652.com), Publisher and Funder
* Scottsdale Homeowners Association, Member
* Public Defender, Legal Assistance
* Illinois Civil litigation Clinic, legal representative
* YMCA Black & Latino Achievers Program, Steering Committee Member
* O’Hallaren Park Advisory Council, Committee Member
* YMCA City Youth in Government Program, Politicla Research Coach
* Univercity of Illinois College of Business, Graduate Counselor
* Illinois Upward Bound College Prep Academy, Physics Instructor
* Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, Academic Advisor
* Cook County Bar Association Young Lawyer’s Section, Member
* Black Law Students Association, Executive Board
* Intellectual Property Legal Society, Vice President
* American Bar Association, Member,
* Patent Office Professional Association, Member
* CAP Beat 614 , community member

**1) City Pensions**

Chicago's fire and police pensions are greatly underfunded, and the city is required by the state to make a $550 million payment into the pension funds by the end of 2015. Do you support restructuring the pension systems, inevitably reducing benefits, to put the funds on sound financial footing?

Yes or No: **NO**

Please Explain:

I believe it is wrong to penalize the very people that are the victims to the the collective mismanagement and abuse this city has experienced. We as a city made a choice to avoid properly funding these pensions. We as a city made these brave men and woman a promise to support them after their working days are over, and we as a city should reassure them that we will not break our promises. This is a problem that we must tackle with the intention of finding the absolute best solutions that benefit the city and our city workers.

Chicago's pension systems for municipal workers and laborers already have been restructured, reducing benefits, but the city has yet to identify where it will find the revenue to sufficiently fund those systems. Under what circumstances would you support a property tax increase to raise the needed revenue for the fire and police pensions and/or the municipal workers and laborers pensions?

I understand that tough decisions need to be made. I will not rule out such an increase, but will reserve that as a last resort. As with any decision I make I would first look to new and alternative solutions such as, different revenue sources, and make sure that these, newly found revenues, are exclusively attached to solving our financial problems.

**2) Chicago Public Schools pensions**

Large and growing payments required to keep the Chicago Teachers’ Pension Fund solvent are squeezing CPS' budget, forcing cuts elsewhere and limiting investment. The Chicago Board of Education has increased property taxes, but it is not enough to keep up with the high annual costs. What measures do you support to ensure a solvent retirement system and to improve the district's finances?

I think it is time to look towards TIF surplus for filling some of the funding shortages of CPS. I believe that funding in our educational system can realistically be considered an investment in the infrastructure of a blighted area.

**3) Revenue**

In light of the financial issues discussed above, do you support any or all of the following measures, each of which would require**,** at a minimum, approval by the Illinois Legislature?

\* A statewide expansion of the sales tax base to include more consumer services

Yes or No: YES

\* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city

Yes or No: YES!

\* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago’s trading exchanges, known as the “LaSalle Street tax”

Yes or No: NO

Please explain your views, if you wish, on any of these three revenue-generating measures.

**4) Crime**

Do you support hiring more police officers to combat crime and gun violence in Chicago?

Yes or No: YES

Please explain:

 We can not put a price on public safety and the lives of our neighbors and we must use all resources this city has to offer to combat crime and deter future occurrences of violence that plagues many communities and I believe a more robust and larger police force can make the difference

What legislation in Springfield would you support to try to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago?

I am not sure further legislation is the answer. By being illegal, we have already established that the transporters will are not following our laws. This is more of an enforcement issue.

**5) Elected school board**

An advisory referendum on switching Chicago to an elected school board, rather than an appointed board, is expected to be on the ballot in more than 30 wards on Feb. 24. Currently, the mayor appoints all seven board membersand the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: YES

Please explain:

I am excited by the idea of returning to an elected school board, which will bring balance and equality to our public education system. I believe a school board should be representative of the community and population of Chicago. This can be seen in the diversity of elected school boards of Atlanta, Dallas, Milwaukee, San Diego, Minneapolis, and San Francisco.

**6) Tax-increment financing districts**

TIFs are the primary economic development tool of the city. In a TIF district, taxes from the growth in property values are set aside for 23 years to be used for public projects and private development. Do you support increasing the annual TIF surplus that the mayor and the City Council have declared in each of the last few years, money that goes to the schools and other city agencies?

Yes or No: NO

What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program?

 I would like to see better oversight on TIFF spending to better apply to blighted areas rather then being used as incentives for developers in already vibrant areas.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

What would you do as alderman to boost economic development in your ward, and bring jobs to your community?

In the 18th ward the biggest obstacle in the way of attracting new businesses and future employers is our infrastructure rather than location. We are conveniently located steps from Midway airport, a Metra one stop away from union station, freight train exchange, industrial space, public parks with golf courses, forest preserves, malls, and a City of Chicago community college. What we lack are the structures to house the jobs and service business need today. The 18th ward can easily serve as a down town satellite campus that can help alleviate inbound traffic from the south west, since most jobs in today’s industries are not restricted by geographic location.

I Imagine a large firm, bank, or insurance company entrepreneur incubator, or digital research facility housed on the 8th floor of a mid-rise or high-rise located behind Ford City Mall or Daily College.  In efforts to promote economic development I have founded and publish a monthly community newspaper that is distributed to over 13,000 homes and businesses in the 18th ward ([**www.TheNeighbor60652.com**](http://www.theneighbor60652.com/)).  This paper features the community at large and highlights its offerings. We also showcase employment opportunities, highlight community heroes, and feature local businesses that are friendly to residents of the 18th ward.

**8) Size of the Chicago City Council**

The City Council has 50 members, but civic groups and other regularly argue for reducing the size of the Council. What should the size of the Council be? Please provide a specific number. And why?

I believe we should stay at 50 city council members. Reducing the number of alderman will not have a substantial financial cost saving affect to the city’s finances. For most residents, an alderman is their first line to city services. They depend on their alderman to act as that connection to city services, departments, and even other elected officials.  In our ward, reducing the number of alderman, or increasing the number of constituents that an alderman serves would negatively affect the quality of life for many. It is not the number of alderman that needs reduction; it’s the amount of ineffective alderman that should be reduced**.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

Do you support, in general concept, establishing a gambling casino in Chicago?

Yes or No: YES

Please explain:

Its clear that the proposal of a Chicago based Casino would be a huge new source of revenue that the city greatly needs. I feel this introduction can be done responsibly and increase tourism.

**10) Red light and speed cameras**

Does the city have an acceptable number of red light and speed cameras currently, and are they properly employed?

Yes or No: No and No

Please explain:

The influx of speed cameras has become an insult to the residents of our city. There advent was presented under the fear of public safety, but it is noticeably clear that revenue was the first priority. As a lawyer I believe in the right to face your accuser rather then relying on a machine to articulate individual circumstances. For a true increase in public safety, the cameras should be used as a deterrent rather then punitive. To achieve this the cameras should be reduced in number by removing them from areas and placed in areas to accomplish clear safety goals.

**11) Ward issues**

What are the top three issues in your ward — the ones you talk about most on the campaign trail?

1. Increased crime that has entered our community
2. A lack of Jobs and Economic development in our ward
3. The lack of Accessibility in the Alderman’s office