**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: **Jen Kramer**

Ward: **43**

Occupation: **Director of Entertainment and Special Events, Navy Pier, Inc.**

Education: **Purdue University, BS, Class of 1993**

 **Carmel High School, Class of 1988**

Previous political and civic experience:

**For several years, I coordinated large-scale happenings for the Mayor’s Office of Special Events – working on the Taste of Chicago, the Chicago Marathon, and both the White Sox and Blackhawk ticker-tape parades.**

**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: **Maybe.**

Please Explain:

**Much of what we do in the future with pensions will depend on the outcome of the court challenge against SB1. If it is ruled unconstitutional, our state’s legislators will be forced to return to the drawing board and develop a consensus plan for pension reform – one that includes all stakeholders. I would like to see an agreement reached that won’t face a challenge in court, and use that framework for pension reform here in Chicago.**

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?

**See above.**

**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?

**We must seek better support from the state and federal governments. Chicago is an important economic engine in the Midwest, and we do not receive state and federal assistance relative to our impact in the region.**

**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: **I am supportive of new revenue measures, but I would need to see more specifics on any proposal to alter or expand the sales tax before committing to revenue changes.**

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

Yes or No: **No.**

\* 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.
**I am open to reasonable ways to modernize our revenue collections in a manner than does not overburden taxpayers, businesses, or job growth in the City of Chicago.**

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No:

Please explain:

**I will work diligently to ensure adequate police coverage throughout Chicago. We must consider the near and short term costs of all new hires.**

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

**I support legislation that will help reduce the flow of illegal guns onto Chicago’s streets. There doesn’t seem to be a single legislative solution to reducing illegal guns, so I believe we need to also focus on improving our education system and creating more job opportunities in our city. More opportunities will provide an alternative to gangs and street violence for Chicago’s youth.**

**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: **No.**

Please explain:

**The only way to keep our great families in this ward is by providing high-quality public schools for our children. As much as I am for the democratic process, we have made amazing strides at CPS under mayoral control of the Chicago Board of Education. There are more STEM, International Baccalaureate and selective-enrollment schools than ever before, and the mayor’s leadership should be commended. It’s clear that mayoral control provides accountability and the flexibility to act accordingly.**

**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: **Yes.**

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

**TIF money should be available for well thought-out public-private partnerships. My future colleagues in council should have resources to bring development to their wards, and TIF districts, when used responsibly, have been an important tool for accomplishing that goal. I would seek to bring more transparency to the TIF process.**

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

**It’s critical that that the alderman work arm in arm with the local chambers of commerce and with the city’s planning department. Establishing powerful relationships with local business owners in other neighborhoods is a good way to bring them into the neighborhood.**

**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 support a reduction, possibly by half, in the number of aldermen. It would reduce costs and allow the public and media to more closely scrutinize the actions of the remaining council members.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: **Yes.**

Please explain:

**We are losing potential revenues to gamblers and tourists that drive across the Indiana border and visit casinos we can see from Chicago. I would support a casino project that is well-sited, with the potential to attract tourists and new visitors, and guarantees substantial revenues for the City of Chicago.**

**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: **Maybe.**

Please explain:

**I support cameras as a tool for ensuring public safety. We should not rely on them for revenue as hopefully they influence behavior and get people stop ignoring red lights. We need to look at the numbers and make sure the program is properly being run and people are not getting tickets they do not deserve.**

**11) Ward issues**

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

**My main priorities as alderman include:**

1. **Ensuring the neighborhood is getting the quality level of city services that it expects and deserves.**
2. **Keeping our neighborhoods safe.**
3. **Rejuvenating our business districts with both responsible development and a focus on recruiting small, local businesses where possible.**