**Chicago Sun-Times**

**2016 Primary Election Questionnaire Key**

**Name:** Thaddeus Jones

**District running for:** 29th State Representative District

**Political party:** Democrat

**Political/Civic Activity:** After the death of my nephew from HIV/AIDS in 2003, I began to work to champion education and awareness of this disease among affected youth and seniors.

**Occupation:** State Representative of the 29th District

**Education:**

* South Suburban College, Associates Degree
* Loyola University, Bachelors Degree
* Loyola School of Law, Currently Attending

**Taxes/Budget:**

**Q.  Illinois has a massive state debt and crushing pension debt. Many elected officials from the governor to state lawmakers have indicated there is a need for additional revenue to help balance the budget.  If Illinois needs to generate additional revenue, which options would you support in a budget package:**

**1.     Increase the state’s income tax on individuals or corporations, either temporarily or permanently.**

We need to look toward taking a balanced approach our state budget. I feel we need to avoid cuts to education and healthcare-related programs, such as cancer screenings and senior care. We cannot raise taxes to simply create new government programs. I also support the adoption of a progressive tax as a means to provide relief for middle-class families as well as instituting a tax on millionaires to provide vital funding for our schools.

**2.     Expand the sales tax to services.**

I feel we need to keep this option on the table to ensure we protect the vital services depended upon by many children, struggling families, and senior citizens. I do not support expanding the sales tax to services to simply create more government programs. We also need to look to options like the millionaires’ tax as an education-funding mechanism as well as a progressive income-tax to provide relief to middle-class families. We must continue to look for ways to consolidate government services to maximize the use of the taxpayers’ dollars.

**3.     Tax retirement income in excess of $50,000.**

Seniors in my district primarily live on fixed incomes and it would be too great a burden to place a tax on their incomes.

**4.     Adopt a progressive income tax.**

I am a co-sponsor of HJRCA 26, and in addition to supporting a progressive income-tax system I also support requiring those who make more than $1 million annually to pay an additional tax to go toward local schools.

**Q) Do you support another legislative attempt at pension reform? If so, which proposed changes in the pension system would you support that you believe would pass constitutional muster?**

Some action must be taken to ensure the solvency of the state’s pension systems. It is owed to the pensioners who have paid into the system and expect their retirement benefits to be there when needed. Any actions taken must include all stakeholders to make sure than any reform is fair, but will also avoid any costly litigation which would only place a greater burden on the state’s financial standing.

**Q) Do you support a budget template developed by a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators that would allow members to pass a budget without the consent of the legislative leaders?**

There are some ideas in the proposal worthy of support, such as pushing the state to continue to make full pension payments as it has for the last seven years, and requiring the state to pay its backlog of bills. We need to continue funding programs like the Child Care Assistance Program, which was cut by Gov. Rauner. The state should push contractors to report their minority participation levels, and look at the options of reforming the income tax and sales tax systems in Illinois to protect middle-class families and support vital resources relied upon by our state’s most vulnerable. Both sides of the aisle need to work together along with the Governor as I have done with such votes as the one taken on House Bill 1287, which would save businesses money by reforming the workers’ compensation system. I am against taxing the retirement income of senior citizens and am opposed to measures that will result in the driving down of the standard of living for middle-class families or the elimination of vital programs that protect our state’s most vulnerable residents.

**Education:**

**Q) What, if anything, should we do to change how we fund schools?**

I support a measure that would make millionaires pay a tax that would go directly to helping our students and local schools. This measure would bring in an estimated $1 billion dollars for education. I feel this is a common-sense step in how we approach education in Illinois. I support converting the Chicago Board of Education into an elected body to provide greater accountability and public input into how resources are allocated in the Chicago Public School system.

**Q) Do you favor the state picking up the pension costs for Chicago teachers, as the state does for teachers outside Chicago? Do you favor school districts outside Chicago picking up their own pension costs, as Chicago does now?**

As I go door to door throughout the district, concern over property taxes is one of the most common issues expressed to me by my constituents. I feel that taxpayers are already overburdened on their property taxes and a cost-shift would only increase that burden.

**Q) State support for public higher education has declined for two decades. Do you favor the status quo or a significant increase in state funding? What is your plan to restore Illinois’ leadership in public higher education?**

The state needs to provide more resources for higher education. The governor has proposed a 30% cut to higher education, which I opposed. As a member of the Higher Education Appropriations Committee, I plan on working with our colleges and universities to go through their budgets to ensure we are putting more resources into the classrooms. We also need to continue to support the MAP grant to provide students the opportunity to get a college education and provide a better future for themselves and their families.

**Transportation**:

**Q) Illinois has a tremendous backlog of infrastructure needs: roads, bridges, waterways, transit. What would be a good way to pay for it? Do you support an increased gas tax — and/or other taxes and fees — to finance infrastructure improvements, including public transit?**

We need to maintain our transit infrastructure by developing and implementing an annual plan. I am open to looking at multiple options for funding infrastructure needs but we must make sure that we are not placing a greater tax burden on middle-class families and should work to ensure that the extremely well-off are paying their fair share.

**Q) Illinois’ public transportation formula provides money for operating costs, but not capital costs. Should Illinois create a reliable funding stream for capital costs?**

I support the creation of a reliable funding stream for capital projects as long as it does not place a greater tax burden on already struggling middle-class families.

**Q) Illinois has long been a strong manufacturing state. Today, Illinois employs fewer than 600,000 manufacturing workers and manufacturing’s share of the Gross State Product has dropped to 12.4 percent.  Our state saw the loss of nearly 10,000 manufacturing jobs in 2015 and announcements from some high-profile companies of job losses. The average manufacturing job pays more than $70,000 and helps create a strong middle class.  Name the top three things that you would do to help attract and retain manufacturing jobs in Illinois.**

Our state needs to be pursuing avenues that lead to increased economic growth by creating strong and stable jobs for middle-class families. The first step is to create economic stability to give businesses the foundation and confidence to reinvest in their companies and expand by hiring more workers. This will attract more businesses to relocate to Illinois from other states.This cannot be done until we adopt a state budget that meets the needs of our residents, including our most vulnerable. Businesses will not want to operate in a state that cannot adopt a budget that excludes basic services for residents. Poor services in the fields of healthcare and education will put Illinois’ workforce at a disadvantage when compared to other states. The governor has failed to work with the General Assembly on implementing a state budget, let alone one that we need in order to attract and grow businesses in Illinois. The governors proposed budget included devastating cuts to the essential services that are needed to provide a strong workforce, and was still billions of dollars out of balance. Many of these programs have already been devastated due to the governor’s refusal to work with the General Assembly to implement a state budget. Illinois also needs to maximize the use of it’s current resources, such as its agricultural and transportation infrastructure. Illinois is a vital transportation hub for the nation and we need to implement a program that continually maintains this important system. Through continual upkeep we will create a more reliable system that will attract more manufacturing and industrial businesses, as well as create more well-paying construction jobs. Our institutions of higher education are also a vital resource in the attracting of new employers to Illinois. We need to support our universities in implementing programs that will train and equip our young people with the skills needed to succeed. Though we need to create a better business environment in Illinois, we must ensure that it is not being done at the expense of middle-class families. If we are to provide specific business incentives, we need to ensure that they are tied to job creation. While many in Illinois have lost their jobs, we cannot be providing major tax breaks for the very same businesses that are responsible for many of those layoffs. We need to work with businesses to create win-win solutions that will help create jobs and provide more stability for middle-class families.

**Q) Illinois has a very diverse energy portfolio and is a net exporter of energy in a deregulated marketplace. Energy is poised to be major issue in 2016 because of federal regulations and possible changes in Illinois’ energy portfolio. Nuclear energy emits zero carbon emissions at a time when the new federal rule requires Illinois to reduce carbon emissions by 44 percent. Do you support or oppose legislation backed by Exelon to create a low-carbon portfolio standard?**

Illinois needs to work to ensure we can meet the energy needs of our residents in a long-term and prudent fashion, and in a way that is conscious of the results of climate change. A low-carbon portfolio is important to provide jobs as well as for lowering carbon emissions.

**Q) Illinois’ current Renewable Portfolio Standard calls for Illinois to procure a certain percentage of renewable power by the year 2020. The state is only halfway to its goal, and there is a proposal to increase the required amount of renewable energy and extending the time period to meet that goal. Do you support or oppose increasing Illinois Renewable Portfolio Standard even if the cost of power increases slightly? Do you support or oppose the Illinois Clean Jobs bill?**

The Clean Jobs bill is good for Illinois because it will save an estimated $1 billion for consumers over the next fifteen years, increase energy efficiency standards and create an estimated 30,000 jobs a year when fully implemented.

**Q) Illinois has to reduce carbon emissions by 44 percent under the federal rule. Do you support creation of either a cap-and-trade program or a carbon tax to help mitigate carbon emissions in Illinois?**

I would like to explore the specifics to make sure we are also protecting small businesses and taxpayers.

**Q) Do you support tighter gun background check laws? Do you support limiting straw gun purchases?**

I support stricter background checks on individuals seeking to purchase firearms, as well as focusing on stopping gun violence in our neighborhoods. In order to stop future events like the mass shooting that took place at Sandy Hook, we need to make sure that we are keeping guns out of the hands of those who are suffering from mental illness.

**Q) Do you support or oppose state licensing for all firearms dealers?**

Support.

**Q) Do you support or oppose allowing families to petition the courts to temporarily remove guns from people in crisis?**

Support.

**Q) Do you support or oppose legislation to promote the transparency and preservation of police disciplinary records?**

Support.

**Q) Do you support the goal of reducing the Illinois adult prison population by 25% by 2025? Would you support sentencing reform such as reducing or eliminating prison terms for non-violent drug offenses? Would you support early release of aged and disabled prisoners predicated on an assessment of risk to public safety prior to release?**

I am open to reviewing specific plans but would want to ensure the rights of victims are upheld before committing to any specific plan or legislation.

**Q) Do you support automatic expungement and sealing of criminal records for all crimes after an appropriate period during which the former offender commits no crimes?**

I would be open to looking at proposed plans as long as it would ensure the safety of victims of any crimes that would be included in any legislation.

**Q) Given that there are more empty beds than youth now in the juvenile prisons, do you support closing one or more juvenile prisons?**

We need to look at the way we treat juvenile offenders to our criminal justice system to work to provide a pathway for these children to turn their lives around. Any action that would result in the reallocation of resources in the criminal justice system must be considered with the safety of any victims of crimes that would be included in any proposal.

**Q) What is your view on a proposal to end the placement of juveniles on the state’s sex offender registry based on assessment of their risk and likelihood to reoffend and/or benefit from treatment? For adult sex offenders, what is your view on delivery of rehabilitation therapy and limiting sex offender registry restrictions only to those men and women assessed to pose a danger to others?**

I stand in support of laws that will ensure the safety of residents and young people from dangerous predators and sex offenders.

**Q) Do you support a form of merit selection of judges?**

I support making it easier for voters to obtain ratings of judicial candidates from bar associations and I feel that the media needs to pay more attention to judicial candidacies.

**Q) Do you support the pending constitutional amendment to create an independent commission to draw legislative districts?**

There are major concerns of the pending constitutional amendment’s negative impact on the voting rights of minorities as well as the resulting ability of minorities to get elected to the General Assembly. I feel we need to address ways to reform the process of reaching a resolution when the legislature and the governor cannot reach an agreement on the proposed legislative boundaries. I have concerns about the long-term ramifications of placing the responsibility of drawing legislative boundaries in the hands of those who cannot be held accountable by voters. I feel the Chicago Board of Education is a good example of what happens when we remove accountability from a government board responsible for an important function. Those who make the decisions should be in a position to answer to the public for the decisions they make. This is currently not the case with the Chicago Board of Education and I fear what might occur if this also becomes the case in the redistricting process.

**Q) What changes in workers’ compensation or tort reform do you favor?**

I have supported efforts to reform workers’ compensation through compromises with the governor that would help save money for businesses while protecting the wages and standard of living for middle-class families. Specific changes included plans to address the issue of causation, repetitive and cumulative injuries, traveling employees, and self-insured employers. I oppose changes to the workers’ compensation system that would hurt middle-class families and lower wages for workers. I feel we can strengthen the economic climate of the state while also working to protect workers and middle-class families.

**Q) Do you support or oppose automatic voter registration?**

Support.

**Q) What sort of ethics and campaign-funding reforms does the state need?**

We need a specific offense written into our criminal code for the theft of public funds, stricter requirement for reports filed by lobbyists, and tougher prosecution and sentencing for public corruption. We also need to make sure our government agencies are open and transparent, including quickly and efficiently responding to Freedom of Information requests. I am open to reviewing other proposals that will increase the public trust as well as hold responsible those who abuse it.

**Q) 2016 is going to be a big year in education, as both state and the City of Chicago wrestle with fundamental issues of funding and school policy. Who was the most important teacher in your life and why?**

There have been two greatly influential teachers in my life.  The first was Mrs. Roach at Cottage Grove Middle School who challenged me to reach beyond my environment in Ford Heights and pay attention to my studies.  Then there was Bill Neagle, Science Teacher at South Suburban College, who taught me to never cut corners and to take pride in a job well-done. Mr. Neagle became one of my strongest supporters during my first race for State Representative and sadly passed away after battling cancer in 2014.