

## 2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Amy Crawford

Ward: 46th

Occupation: Litigation Partner at Kirkland & Ellis, LLP

Education: B.A., University of Notre Dame, *magna cum laude*, majoring in government and economics (1998); J.D., University of Chicago (2004).

Previous political and civic experience:

Politically, I worked on the staff of the 2008 Obama campaign for six months. I have raised funds for various Democratic candidates, including Senator Durbin, Treasurer-Elect Mike Frerichs, and Josina Morita, a candidate for Metropolitan Water Reclamation District. I was in the 2014 class of Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership (IWIL), which trains Democratic women to run for office. Going much further back, I was my high school class president and class treasurer at the University of Notre Dame, and interned on campaigns in Ohio during college.

Civically, I have represented clients pro bono in numerous LGBT civil rights cases, including marriage equality litigation in Illinois, as co-counsel to organizations such as Lambda Legal, the ACLU, and Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund. I was selected as a top LGBT attorney under 40 by the National LGBT Bar Association.

I have served for five years on the board of directors at North Side Community Federal Credit Union, which provides financial products to low- and moderate-income people on the city's North Side, offering alternatives to payday loans and other predatory lending practices. I am currently the secretary of the board. I recently became the president of North Side Center for Financial Empowerment, a non-profit spinoff of the credit union that will house the credit union's housing counseling and financial education services. I have co-chaired multiple fundraising galas for Howard Brown Health Center, a community health organization focusing on the LGBT community. Prior to law school, I worked in resource development at Christopher House, an early childhood education agency. North Side Community FCU, Howard Brown, and Christopher House are all located in the 46th Ward.

I am also a fellow of Leadership Greater Chicago, a leadership development program for emerging Chicago leaders.

## 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: A qualified yes.

Please Explain:

There's no question that fire and police pensions present a serious financial issue for the city, and the need for reform is urgent. However, I don't think the city can make up for the difference by unilaterally reducing pension benefits that were promised to first responders when they signed on. This is not just a question of what the city *should* do, but of what it is legally obligated to do. The Pension Clause of the Illinois Constitution is straightforward in preventing the diminishment of benefits provided to public employees, and court rulings striking down statewide pension reform efforts have reaffirmed this principle.

That said, I think everyone, including police and fire personnel, understand that that this is a serious problem requiring serious solutions. All Chicagoans suffer when we can't meet our ballooning pension obligations. Many city unions reached agreement with the mayor on the mayor's pension reform proposal earlier this year, and I am hopeful that the police and fire unions will be looking for common ground with the mayor to reach real solutions to this problem in the months ahead.

Further, going forward, we need to do serious work both to ensure that public employee pension funds are fully funded each year instead of borrowing from future generations, and that the pension benefits offered to new hires are sustainable and generous without being exorbitant.

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 will look to the mayor to provide leadership on the issue of how to raise sufficient revenue to fund these pensions. It is widely expected that the mayor will propose a property tax increase in 2015. I would support a proposed property tax increase so long as the city continues to protect senior citizens and others on fixed incomes from such an increase. We should also consider other revenue-raising avenues so that the burden doesn't fall exclusively on property owners. Such ideas include the

expansion of the state sales tax to more services, a progressive city income tax, the “LaSalle Street Tax”, and closing corporate tax loopholes.

## **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?

First, the state and city should provide proper funding for the pension system. Our pension crisis became what it is by failing to provide adequate funding in years past. This underfunding of the system at the expense of future generations should not be permitted to happen again. In particular, the state should provide support for the pension fund as it does for the remainder of school districts statewide. We also need to be open to additional sources of revenue to compensate for the historical underfunding of the system.

Second, as with fire and police union pensions, a solution needs to be reached between the Chicago Teachers Union and the city. Again, no one benefits from an insolvent pension system. Such an agreement may require greater contributions from teachers or a reduction in pay raises. Further, pension payments to future employees should not be allowed to reach levels that are exorbitant relative to other retirement systems.

## **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: Yes.

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

The statewide sales tax on services should be expanded. It's my understanding that Illinois generally taxes fewer services than many other states, so expanding this tax is appropriate. And the tax on services tend to be less regressive in their impact than sales taxes on purchased goods, in that business and professional services are not as widely utilized by low-income individuals as moderate- or higher-income individuals.

I am tentatively in support of a modest tax on nonresidents working in the city. This tax would pay for public services, including police, fire, and sanitation, that benefit people working in the jurisdiction. Other cities have implemented such a tax, and I have not seen data indicating that this has resulted in an appreciable decrease in jobs in the city. This may not be an ideal solution for raising revenue, but I think all options need to be on the table as we work to get out of our current crisis.

I'm also tentatively in support of the "LaSalle Street Tax." I'm concerned about the potential for this tax to result in jobs moving out of the city. However, this is always the counterargument offered in opposition to additional taxes on corporations. Again, given our current crisis, I think all options need to be on the table.

#### **4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

While violent crime and murder rates have fallen across much of the city, they have not fallen in the 46th Ward as a result of the 25% decrease in police in the 19th district. Officers face a "whack-a-mole" effect: officers are shifted to focus on robberies in Boystown, and then shootings rise in Uptown. Then officers are shifted to Uptown, and burglaries rise in West Lakeview. We need adequate staffing in order for our police to be able to patrol proactively, so that they are not just running call to call.

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

I would support virtually any legislation designed to stem the flow of illegal guns into our city. Specifically, I support a statewide assault weapons ban, longer sentences

for gun crimes and unlawful possession, longer waiting periods, and harsher penalties for gun shops found to have violated laws regulating the sale of firearms. I also support stronger federal legislation and believe city and state leaders need to work with neighboring states on curbing the flow of guns into Chicago.

### **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 members and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

I support an elected school board. All of the other school districts in this state have an elected board, and Chicago does not merit different treatment. I believe the current system of mayoral appointments has resulted in a board skewed toward the perspective of the elite, where parents and teachers do not have a voice in the board's decisions. This has resulted in teachers and families feeling alienated and demanding greater transparency. I believe that in order to truly turn around our schools, we need all stakeholders to be at the table, working toward a common goal.

### **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?

I believe that far too many tax dollars are diverted away from public schools and other priorities to TIF funds, and that much more oversight and transparency into this revenue stream is needed. I would support legislation to limit the use of TIFs to truly blighted areas, instead of in areas where economic development would occur anyway in the absence of a TIF. I would also support legislation adjusting the base each year for inflation. I also believe that any new TIF plan should contain detailed budgets and tax increment caps, and that annual TIF reports should contain a detailed accounting of

surplus increment. I also believe that 100% of the current TIF surplus should be reinvested in our public schools.

## **7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

To date, I have promoted economic development in my ward through my service on the board of North Side Community Federal Credit Union, which has a small business lending program and helps low- to moderate-income people achieve financial self-sufficiency. We need ongoing city support of small business lending programs to help small businesses grow and thrive.

I would attract more employers to the 46th Ward by focusing on the development of an entertainment district around the Uptown Square at Lawrence and Broadway, along with other key intersections in the ward. I would work to attract a critical mass of new restaurants and retail that can service concertgoers in the ward and create a more inviting streetscape. I would also make sure existing business owners within our TIF districts are aware of the availability of Small Business Improvement Funds (SBIF) and other tools to make improvements to their properties, such as the removal of unsightly and often nonfunctional security gates.

I will make it clear to employers in the ward that I believe the hiring of local workers is part of their bargain with the community, and that they should hire locally whenever possible. I will work to promote job readiness and training programs in the ward, and will host hiring fairs for local businesses and local workers. I would also support an effort to connect students from Uplift High School and/or Truman College with local small businesses to help businesses create or improve their social media presence, which would lead to greater job readiness and perhaps some job offers.

## **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'm reluctant to offer a specific proposal for reducing the size of City Council, because I don't yet have full knowledge of how the City Council's current size hampers or benefits its function. However, I generally support the proposal to cut City Council in half, to 25 members.

Without having the benefit of an insider's perspective, it certainly seems to this outsider that having a 50-person legislature has not served our city well. With each alderman controlling his or her own fiefdom, the economic incentive and broad ability to commit fraud or otherwise enrich oneself to the detriment of ward residents has proven too great for too many aldermen over the years. In a system with fewer aldermen, city departments would have to be given greater responsibility, freeing up aldermen to engage more intensively with serious policy decisions. Millions would be saved by cutting the aldermanic budgets. Bigger wards would also provide a better pool of qualified candidates.

### **9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

I don't believe we can or should rely significantly on casino gambling to address our budget issues, and I would be opposed to broad expansion of casino gaming. I know people who have been touched by gambling addictions, and often, those with addictions are those who can least afford it. However, I'm open to a single casino in Chicago so that the city can reap the kind of profits that other nearby communities have received, so long as any such facility is subject to strong oversight and ethical standards.

### **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.

Please explain:

I'm not opposed to the red-light and speed camera programs in principle, but they have been the subject of poor administration and abuse. The issues surrounding the relationship between the vendor and City Hall further undermine public confidence in the City's ability to get a fair deal from its vendors or private partners. Further, recent evidence has shown that the cameras are being deployed in a way that isn't making us safer. Greater oversight of this program and the vendor is needed if the city is going to continue to utilize the cameras and benefit from the revenue stream they create.

## 11) Ward issues

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

1. Crime. In the 46th ward, crime has risen following the 25% decrease in staffing in the 19th district. The violent crime in the neighborhood, particularly gang-related gun violence, scares residents into moving out of the ward, and prevents businesses from thriving. As discussed above, we need more police on our streets. In addition, we also need more youth engagement programs to keep kids in the ward off the streets and build a sense of community pride in which violence isn't tolerated.

2. Balanced development. First, we need more small businesses. We continue to have too many vacant storefronts all around the ward. We have the makings of a great entertainment district in the northern part of the ward, and we need to promote it more actively to small businesses geared toward catering to concertgoers. In addition, small business owners need a champion who will help them cut through city bureaucracy when working to expand or improve their businesses.

Second, we need to promote development in a balanced way that (1) doesn't overemphasize market-rate high-rise units to the exclusion of other development; (2) provides an open process in which residents are put first instead of being left as an afterthought once deals are already struck with developers behind the scenes; and (3) preserves and, where needed, improves the affordable housing in the ward.

3. Constituent services. Residents are frustrated with declining ward services and unresponsiveness. They want basic Streets and Sanitation services provided in a timely manner. They also want a 21st century ward office that communicates with them proactively about what's going on in the ward.