**Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Board questionnaire responses**

**Name:** Amanda Howland

**District running for:** 6th Congressional District

**Political/civic background:**

I am currently serving my 2nd six year term as an elected Trustee for the College of Lake County.

I am a graduate of the Illinois Women’s Institute for Leadership. I was one of 10 women in the State selected as a delegate for 2011.

I am a member of the Lake Zurich Area Chamber of Commerce and have served on various committees.

I spent 4 years as Marketing Chair for the Hawthorn Woods Women’s Charity (501(c) (3)).

I spent 3 years as the Caravel Condominium Association Vice President 2004-2006.

I am a member of the Caring Women’s Connection (501 (c) (3)) charity actively supporting women and children in need throughout Lake County.

I have served on the Illinois State Bar Association’s Judicial Evaluation Committee for the past 15 years.

I am a trained CASA (court appointed special advocate) for children and a Guardian ad Litem.

**Occupation:**

Attorney and mediator

Former school administrator

Former teacher of emotionally disturbed/behavior disordered students

**Education:**

B.S. in Ed.

M.A. (Psychology)

M.S. in Ed. Administration

J.D.

**Campaign website:**

www.amandahowlandforcongress.com

**Legislative priorities:**

Q) *What are your three top national legislative priorities for the country?*

A)

(1) strong national security and defense against terrorism, (2) preserving Social Security and Medicare, and (3) modernizing infrastructure to support economic growth.

Q: *What are the three most important issues in your district on which you believe the federal government needs to act?*

The people in the 6th Congressional District want to be treated fairly by government policies so that they can feel secure and help their children prosper. Because of the hyper-partisanship this congress has refused to address the issues that are strangling our middle class. We need elected officials who are willing to put the needs of our district before those of the special interests.

As a recently re-elected Trustee at the College of Lake County I know that one of the top priorities in my district is to solve the problem of excessive student debt. Students who graduate with massive debt cannot support the economy by making discretionary purchases like houses and cars. Instead, they must pay high interest rates on student loans, often for many years to come.

I see families struggling every day while congress ignores what is happening to them. Our federal tax code must prioritize strengthening the middle class. We need reform to minimize the types of loopholes, tax havens and accounting gimmicks that allow wealthy special interests to avoid taxes. We must support and grow our middle class through business incentives for job creation and bringing jobs back from overseas.

We need to break the gridlock in Congress and make progress on domestic budget priorities such as repairing and replacing infrastructure, like roads, bridges and schools, and protecting social security. As a long-time advocate for senior citizens I have seen firsthand why it is important to preserve social security and Medicare.

Q) *What is your biggest fundamental difference with your opponent(s)?*

A)

My opponent has run for (but never won) national offices as both a Libertarian and as a Republican. It is unclear what his motivation is for choosing this cycle to run as a Democrat or for Congress in particular. It’s also unclear where he stands on issues or what his priorities would be, so it is difficult for me to identify differences between us.

I can say with certainty that I have run for and won elected office twice (I am in my second term as a Trustee for the College of Lake County), and I have always been a pragmatic Democrat dedicated to improving my community by finding results-oriented solutions to the challenges facing middle class families. I have worked my entire career as an advocate – for special needs children, senior citizens, college students and Lake County taxpayers. I am running to bring that same commitment to a Congress that needs fewer career politicians and more people working to get things done.

**Transparency:**

Q) *Will you pledge to make public: a) your campaign schedule; b) your fundraiser schedule and the names of all fundraiser hosts ; c) if elected, your daily schedule of meetings? If not, why not?*

A) Yes.

Q) *Please list all relatives on public or campaign payrolls and their jobs on those payrolls.*

A) There are none

**National security:**

Q) *What are the most important actions Congress can take to reduce the threat of ISIS abroad and at home?*

A)

ISIS is undoubtedly a serious threat, so I do not oppose U.S. military action to defeat them. At the same time, the most important action Congress can take is supporting a long-term solution that will lead to greater stability in the region rather than repeated bursts of American military action. The United States should lead diplomatic efforts to form a military coalition, comprised of soldiers from the region, to apply military pressure where needed to expel ISIS from its territory. The U.S. cannot continue to engage in military actions to police every part of the world, which burdens our nation and enflames anti-American sentiment (which in turn makes the effort even more difficult). At the same time, we should encourage our allies to work with us to economically isolate bad actors. The more we cut off their sources of funding, the less capable they will be of military and guerilla action.

Q) *What bans, if any, do you support on Muslim admissions to the United States? Please explain your position.*

A)

There are two fundamental problems with the notion of banning “Muslim admissions to the United States” – practicality and principle. First, it is impossible to strictly enforce such a ban. There is no reliable method – much less some objective standard – for identifying an individual’s faith. Second, the United States was founded on the belief that government should not favor or persecute a particular religion. Our religious ban all Muslims from entering our country would undermine that legacy while fueling the anti-American propaganda that terrorist organizations exploit to recruit new members.

Q) *Specifically, how would you have, or how did you, vote on the American Security Against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act of 2015 and its efforts to make it harder for Syrian and Iraqi refugees to enter the U.S.? Please explain your position.*

A)

The SAFE Act sounds like good proposal. Background checks are very important with the current expansion of terrorism and our agencies need to coordinate with each other and with foreign agencies. It should be noted that the attacks in Paris were committed by citizens not refugees. Also, making it even harder for refugees of Syria and Iraq to enter the U.S. will not necessarily make us safer. The majority of refugees are fleeing war and persecution and are looking for safety. Yet, they still must pass through one of the most rigorous screening processes any country imposes. We should always ensure that process is effective, but a terrorist wishing to enter the U.S. has easier alternatives than enduring a years-long refugee screening procedure

I agree with Representative Hoyer who said that the SAFE Act rests on a faulty assumption that Europe’s refugee screening process is similar to the United States’ screening process. This is totally incorrect. Rather than improve security, Representative Hoyer believes that H.R 4038 would prevent refugees from entering the country by making the vetting process overly inefficient. Our lax visa waiver system is actually a bigger problem than refugees.

Q) *Do you support a Syrian no-fly zone or the U.S. enforcement of Syrian humanitarian safe zones? Why or why not?*

A)

A no-fly zone will not solve the problems in Syria. Most of the casualties there are caused by ground forces not by Russian or other military planes. For example, in 1995, the massacre of more than 8,000 Bosnians in Srebrenica took place in a NATO-enforced no-fly zone. How would the U.S. enforce the zone? Also, establishing such a zone would be extremely costly with little or no return for the U.S. and could potentially cause a hot-war confrontation with Russia.

Most experts say the idea of establishing a safe zone may sound good but the process of actually enforcing such zones would be complex and costly and require the U.S. to wade deeper militarily in the Middle East.  A safe zone has to be an “all or nothing” proposition: either the international community, or a significant segment of it, commits to continued support for a safe zone and honors those commitments, or the idea of a safe zone should be abandoned entirely; there is no safe middle ground.

Q) *Regarding the House Benghazi Select Committee, should its investigation remain open-ended, or should the panel be given a deadline to complete its work? Please explain.*

A)

The attacks in Benghazi were both a tragic loss of life and a failure by our government to foresee and protect against the threats in Libya. Numerous investigations by Congress and the State Department have proven that while identifying areas of improvement that will help prevent such tragedies in the future. Each additional investigation reinforces the conclusions already established and provides even less new information than the one before it. The current investigation seems destined for the same result, so it seems reasonable to set a deadline for the committee to report its conclusions.

Q) *What measures, if any, do you support to give U.S. authorities access to encrypted or “dark web” communications about potential terrorist plots? Please explain.*

A)

The Dark Web allows users to remain anonymous and difficult to track. Government needs to work with the private technology sector as this technology continues to evolve so that it can be used to help intelligence agencies infiltrate terrorist plots while respecting Americans’ right to privacy.

Q) *Do you support transferring the detention of terrorism suspects from Guantanamo Bay to the United States? Why or why not?*

A)

Guantanamo is a waste of taxpayer dollars. Costs are estimated at 2.7 million annually per inmate. It is also a “black eye” for America as seen by other countries. In addition, terrorist groups use it as a recruiting tool. If we can provide a secure facility elsewhere and eliminate some of the expense involved in detaining these suspects we should look at doing so**.**

**Gun violence:**

Q) *What is the single most important action Congress can take to reduce U.S. gun violence?*

A)

We need better enforcement of the laws already in place and closing loopholes.  Every single year, more than 30,000 Americans have their lives cut short by guns used in suicides, domestic violence, gang shootouts and accidents. I believe in the Second Amendment and have several hunters in my family and am also trained in use of a firearm, I also believe we can find ways to reduce gun violence consistent with the Second Amendment.

Q) *Do you support or oppose the ‘‘Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act?” Please explain your position.*

A)

The [Government Accountability Office](http://www.sfgate.com/search/?action=search&channel=nation&inlineLink=1&searchindex=gsa&query=%22Government+Accountability+Office%22), said in a report more than five years ago that from 2004 to 2010, more than 90 percent of the 1,228 individuals on terrorist watch lists who sought to buy guns were allowed to do so. This legislation would close this loophole.

Opponents say that government watch lists are often incorrect and that this Act would limit the rights of people who are on the watch list by mistake. The way to resolve this problem is to address the deficiencies of an unreliable watch list rather than simply maintaining a status quo that permits potential terrorists to purchase deadly firearms.

**Climate change:**

Q) *Do you believe there is scientific evidence of climate change, and is it caused by human activity? What is your position on the Paris climate change agreement?*

A)

Climate change is real and science shows that humans are at least partially responsible. I believe that the Paris climate change agreement is a solid step in the direction of reversing – or at least slowing -- human-caused climate change. We cannot afford to do nothing as the oceans rise and weather disasters become more and more common.

**Economy:**

Q) *What changes, if any, to the U.S. tax code do you support and why?*

A)

Our federal tax code must prioritize strengthening the middle class, while minimizing the types of loopholes, tax havens and accounting gimmicks that allow wealthy special interests to avoid taxes.

Q) *What are the most important actions Congress can take to ensure the solvency of Social Security?*

A)

I support strengthening Social Security and will support measures that preserve it for future generations without harming current retirees and without cutting benefits for poor and/or middle income level seniors.

We need a balanced approach to reform that will not cripple either the programs or taxpayers. Congress should definitely avoid turning over Social Security and Medicare to the private sector, where it can be expected that corporate profit motives would likely undermine the stability of the systems and the benefits for seniors.

Q) *Do you support a “risk fee” on big banks? Why or why not?*

A)

We need to hold banks accountable. In 2010 Congress proposed a bill that would impose fees on banks. This was partly the result of the “too big to fail” disaster that hit our economy. Risk is an inevitable part of investing and is not inherently worth discouraging. But banks that tap into government-insured consumer deposits to invest in highly risky schemes are betting with the American taxpayers’ money, not just their own. While I would consider a fee on high-risk investments, which could reward sound management and discourage practices that threaten our financial system, such a fee also has the potential to disrupt our banking system with unintended consequences. I support finding a solution to this problem that strengthens our financial system while protecting taxpayers.

**Health care:**

Q) *Should Obamacare be overturned, left intact, or changed — and if so how?*

A)

Eliminating the ACA is not the answer. It has many excellent provisions and has provided health care for millions who were previously uninsured. We can't take away this vital safety net now that we have it. Too many families will suffer. Inability to pay medical bills accounted for 60% of bankruptcies before the ACA was enacted. In addition, 17% of our economy is related to healthcare, so getting it right is vital. 

However, the ACA also has caused some unintended problems that Congress needs to address. High costs, rising premiums and high deductibles for those who do not qualify for subsidies have occurred. We also need to find ways to get unrestrained prescription drug costs under control. The state of Massachusetts dealt with similar problems when it instituted its healthcare plan years ago. They were able to implement reforms and now have a model health care system.

Q) *Do you favor stripping federal funds from Planned Parenthood? Why or why not?*

A)

NO. Planned Parenthood provides critical services to nearly three million people. More than 90% of what Planned Parenthood provides is cancer screenings, birth control, and STD testing and treatment. They also provide preventive health care services to women.

**Immigration:**

Q) *President Obama used his executive powers to prevent the deportation of "DREAMers—youths who came to the U.S. illegally as children with their parents. Would you support legislation to prevent DREAMer deportations? Do you support putting DREAMers on a path to citizenship?*

A)

I support the premise of the DREAM Act which was intended to permit the [children](http://www.mail2web.com/cgi-bin/read.asp?mb=inbox&mp=I&mps=0&lid=0&ld=-1&lp=20&mn=24506&ed=wWqIlET0CUTfMLWbPJd4As5YjJOw%2B3hl5%2Bi2ijlSdRFpmUIb0LoPioH48vRLQkEKPYAnH5bg9RPE%0D%0AdMRTK7eJgG%2BITjjAPszPUFhJlXJa4hGe6aaS4loagwQpPkMm5dqItvYjgJSKvATDYfSKqMyIkbmT%0D%0Avtf%2B%2F2U%3D) of undocumented immigrants, who were brought here as young children, to attend college. These young people did not choose to come to the United States illegally. Supporting the DREAM Act allows us to support young people who are, in every respect but one, Americans. They can be a force for economic growth and innovation for us if we help them now. For so many of the students, the U.S. is the only country they know, and it would be inhumane and impractical to deport all of them, most to countries that are entirely foreign to them. As a trustee at the College of Lake County I have personally met some of our DACA students. They are working hard to lead productive lives and to contribute to the economy.

I also believe there can be a compromise on a path to citizenship for many. We cannot deport 11 million undocumented immigrants who already live here, many of whom have jobs and aspire only to support their families. I think there should be a reform of ICE, in which the priorities include a more compassionate process and stiff penalties for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers in order to exploit them. Naturally, we must ensure we have a strong border, since we have every right and expectation that we will control who enters our country. At the same time, we need to be honest in this discussion and acknowledge that up to 40% of illegal immigrants currently in the U.S. arrived here legally and overstayed their visas.

**Education:**

Q) *What congressional reforms do you favor to address America’s student loan crisis?*

A)

As a second term elected Trustee at the College of Lake County one of the top priorities in my district is to solve the problem of excessive student debt. We need to reduce the interest rates on these loans, allow for consolidation and look for ways to make repayment easier. Students who graduate with massive debt cannot support the economy by making discretionary purchases like houses and cars. Instead, they must pay high interest rates on student loans, often for many years to come. Going forward, reforming the way students and parents pay for college could revolutionize the ability of U.S. workers to compete in the global economy. We also should make support for technical education at all levels a priority.

Another possibility to explore is to allow loan forgiveness for those who work in certain fields after graduation.