**Name:** Dan Wilbrandt

**District running for:** 66th District State Representative

**Political party:** Republican

**Political/civic background:** West Dundee Village Trustee

**Occupation:** McHenry County Assistant State’s Attorney

**Education:** The John Marshall Law School (J.D., 2012), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (M.A., 2009), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (B.A., 2006)

**Campaign website:** www.ElectWilbandt.com

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

**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.*

*2.     Expand the sales tax to services.*

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

*4.     Adopt a progressive income tax.*

*If you oppose all tax hikes, please provide specifics on how you would reduce state spending by $7 billion to balance the state budget.*

A) **I oppose all tax hikes. Illinois has a spending problem, not a revenue problem. The state has not had a balanced budget since 2002 and spending currently outpaces inflation and revenues from taxes. This coupled with a massive amount of resident out-migration (95,000 left in 2014) creates a financial black hole of a budget. Over the last 20 years, Illinois has lost nearly 1.4 million residents and estimated $7.6 million each year in state and local tax revenue. An unfriendly business and resident taxpayer climate has furthered the State’s financial woes as we still have not recovered from the Great Recession. Piecemeal budget fixes will not help the middle class taxpayers and only true reform will correct the State’s financial outlook. If the State was barred from spending more than the percentage of inflation, spending would not exceed yearly revenues and the State would be under budget.**

**High salaries paid to State employees are a good starting point for reducing costs. Specifically, Illinois pays government workers, on average, 27% more than the private sector. This is simply overpaying market value for services and throwing away taxpayer dollars for the same work to be done through the government. In a time of financial uncertainty, the state cannot afford to overpay employees and spike salaries and pensions. I will not vote for tax increases when the need to cut costs is the highest priority.**

**My second priority is to promote business development in the state. Illinois continues to have a weak recovery from the Great Recession and has lost over 216,000 jobs, many of them manufacturing jobs lost to neighboring states. To reverse the hemorrhaging of residents and jobs, we must enact workers’ compensation reform, lawsuit reform, regulatory reform (making it easier to do business in Illinois), and tax and spending reform. Of course, pension reform must also be passed or else increased revenues will be drained by unfunded pension liabilities.**

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?*

A) **The state pension systems are the single most problematic aspect of state government. Illinois’ pension systems are essentially going broke as revenue inflows are exceeded by payments. The Illinois Supreme Court struck down Senate Bill 1 in May of 2015, holding that pension benefits cannot be diminished or impaired. The Court found the Pension Protection Clause protects both earned and unearned benefits. Therefore, an amendment to the Illinois Constitution to reform future pensions is necessary. Legislator pensions should be eliminated and transitioned to a 401-K type system, new workers should be offered a self-managed 401-K type system and other investment options, and current pensioned employees should be allowed the option to opt in to a self-managed 401-K type system. Pre-retirement salary spiking and annual cost of living adjustments that exceed inflation have exponentially skyrocketed the unfunded pension balances the State is liable for. This must end. If future pension reform is not passed by the legislature now, it too must be done by Constitutional Amendment on a statewide ballot. Without reform, no one, including current or future retirees, will have any chance of receiving benefits.**

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?*

A) **Yes. I am supportive of any measure that will work to balance the budget and end the political games tied to its passage. We still do not have a budget for this year and Governor Rauner has proposed a budget that only spends what will be raised in revenue in 2016 and I would support this. We must spend within our means just as households in the State are doing.**

**Education:**

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

A) **School funding is not struggling because of the amount of revenue from property taxes or money received from the State. The real problem is pension costs and lack of any pension reform. For every $1.00 of education dollar, about $0.70 of it goes to pay for education pensions and retirement. In the very near future, Illinois schools will be spending more on pensions and retirement for employees than education for the children. Also, historically upward spending on education has not yielded improved test scores or college preparedness. To correct these trends, the State must enact pension reform and localize tax dollars so that the education revenues can directly impact the local students.**

**I would be a strong proponent of education and education funding reform, beginning with future pensions. If the State moves to a more needs based funding formula, the collar counties, including McHenry and Kane, would receive less funding. I will support getting the funding our community needs for education and will fight to facilitate the high standards our community has for our schools. I will work with the school districts to address their needs in order to provide the best education with our local education dollars.**

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?*

A) **I do not favor the State picking up the pension costs for Chicago teachers.** **There are too many loopholes in the Illinois education formula, or General State Aid. School districts are able to make themselves appear more in need by under reporting local property wealth, which subsidies are based on. School districts are then able to receive higher than required Property Tax Extension Limitation Law money. Districts have come to rely on these government subsidies rather than efficient spending. On average, education spending increases approximately 5% a year. Education should be a local issue. Decisions dealing with curriculum and funding should be made at the local, not State level.**

**Current legislation being considered, Senate Bill 1 and Senate Bill 16, involve the State deciding winners and losers amongst all school districts and which receive more or less funding. Senate Bill 1 and Senate Bill 16 do not factor in financial disparity of school districts because of wealth hiding and allows Chicago schools to deduct pension costs from the State Aid formula, making them among the neediest districts. I do not support Chicago manipulating the system to get more education dollars.**

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?*

A) **We cannot even discuss increases in state funding for higher education until the pension system has been reformed. Increasing spending for higher education will do nothing if those dollars are still being spent for 6-figure pensions. Rather than throwing money at a symptom of the problem, I will work to fix the cause – pensions.**

**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?*

A) **I do not support any increased taxes or fees. Illinois can begin to save money on the cost of infrastructure projects by reforming worker’s compensation. Also, costs will be reduced by eliminating prevailing wage from public infrastructure construction. Construction costs are out of control because Illinois is lagging behind our neighboring states and their worker’s compensation laws.**

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

A) **Until other financial reforms have been enacted (pensions, worker’s compensation, balanced budget) there is no such thing as a reliable funding stream. Illinois cannot begin to focus on capital projects until these reforms are enacted.**

**Jobs:**

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.*

A)

**1.) I will work to reform worker’s compensation. Illinois has the highest workers’ compensation cost in the Midwest and ranks 7th in the nation. Recently, State Comptroller Leslie Munger stated that workers’ compensation is a budgetary matter. Merely changing Illinois’ no fault causation standard to an “arising out of and in the course of employment” standard, tightens the circumstances of injuries and ensures that eligible claims occurred at work. Reforming workers’ compensation language to include only injuries at work which were “major contributing causes” of a medical condition and redefining a “traveling employee” would also narrow the range of injury claims. Together, these reforms to workers’ compensation law in Illinois could reduce insurance premiums on state businesses, making it more attractive to move or stay in the State for business. With simple reforms, Illinois could save hundreds of thousands of dollars in expenses, generate increased tax revenue from business growth, and reduce the cost of public construction work within the state.**

**2.) I will work to pass a property tax freeze and reforms. The high price of property taxes are causing Illinois residents to move out of state and find jobs in neighboring states that are more tax and business friendly. Illinois homeowners pay the 2nd highest property taxes in the nation, second only to New Jersey. I would fully support a property tax freeze for 2-5 years. Such a freeze has been proposed in House Bill 4224. The tax rate would be frozen at the current level and only local voters would have the ability to approve increases. Local government would have the power to reform collective bargaining agreements, allowing competitive bidding rather than prevailing wage rates to apply. However, this must be done in combination with pension, workers’ compensation, and business climate reforms. Merely passing a property tax freeze could have a devastating effect on local governments without the relief provided by other reforms and the elimination of unfunded state mandates.**

**3.) Illinois must become a right to work state to be competitive with our neighbors. Illinois will continue to lose manufacturing jobs if this is not enacted.**

**Energy:**

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?*

A) **Energy in Illinois should continue to be competitive in achieving the lowest rates for consumers. I support legislation creating a low carbon portfolio standard.**

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?*

A) **I support the Illinois Clean Jobs Bill. Measures are still being taken to mitigate any potential increases in costs and this must continue for me to support the bill. There are rate caps currently, but they are set very high.**

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?*

A) **No. Over-regulation will continue to cause businesses to leave our state. Illinois cannot afford to lose any more business/manufacturing.**

**Gun safety:**

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

A) **No. The background check laws are sufficient.**

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

A) **Over-regulating and licensing puts limitations on business and I do not support over-regulating this industry.**

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

A) **If a family crisis situation exists, the family should be able to have all guns removed temporarily until the crisis can be addressed. This is similar to a condition of a defendant’s bond, requiring the defendant to turn over all firearms to police upon arrest.**

**Criminal justice:**

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

A) **In light of recent local police scandals, there should be greater transparency in those agencies entrusted with the duty to protect the residents.**

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?*

A) **I do not support reducing prison populations, terms, or early releases for the sake of downsizing. Some criminal defendants need to be incarcerated. The safety of the community demands that criminals be deterred from recidivism.**

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?*

A) **No. Just because someone who has committed past crimes has not committed one recently, is no guarantee that he or she will not commit a future crime. A criminal record of a defendant serves as a public safety protection.**

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

A) **Yes. As a cost saving measure, if the facilities are not needed to support juvenile detainees, there is no point in paying to keep them open on the taxpayer’s dime.**

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?*

A) **There are two different types of registries for juveniles; a 10-year registration and a lifetime registration. Both of these registrations are limited in scope and publicity compared to the adult version of the sex offender registry. I believe the registries serve a public safety purpose, and if a defendant does not meet the criteria to be placed on such a registry, then that defendant will not have to register. Those minors who could potentially be placed on the registry are required to be evaluated and recommendations are given to the Courts. Those required to register will be known by the public in order to enhance safety of the community.**

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

A) **No. I believe judges should answer to the people and should be elected by the people.**

**Other:**

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

A) **Yes. I fully support this measure.**

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

A) **Merely changing Illinois’ no fault causation standard to an “arising out of and in the course of employment” standard, tightens the circumstances of injuries and ensures that eligible claims occurred at work. Reforming workers’ compensation language to include only injuries at work which were “major contributing causes” of a medical condition and redefining a “traveling employee” would also narrow the range of injury claims. Together, these reforms to workers’ compensation law in Illinois could reduce insurance premiums on state businesses, making it more attractive to move or stay in the State for business.**

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

A) **I oppose automatic registration. Merely registering more voters does not mean more people will go to the polls to vote. Responsible residents register themselves to vote and then go to the polls.**

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

A) **Reforms and laws are only as good as the individuals who are supposed to follow them. Unfortunately, many will find ways to circumvent any regulations put in place.**

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?*

A) **My mother was and is the most important teacher in my life. Not only is my mother a retired elementary school teacher, she taught me many things outside of school. I believe parents need to be more involved with their children’s education so that the children have the best opportunity to develop and use the skills they learn at school. I cannot ever say enough about the quality of education I learned from my mother.**