**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: JAMES E. DUKES

Ward: 17TH

Occupation: Pastor

Education: D. Min of Divinity, Master of Theological Studies, Master of Counseling and a Bachelor of Science Business Administration

Previous political and civic experience: Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s Public Safety Transition Team, Helping Hands of Englewood (CARE Partner), Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s Community Advisory Board for Safer Chicago, Police Superintendent McCarthy’s Advisory Committee, Cook County Justice Advisory Council

**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: Yes

Please Explain: I support a comprehensive plan of Pension Reform that would reduce future payments and a more defined plan such as 401(k); but the past payments have already been promised and are owed. The city should investigate how to create another stream of revenue that would greatly contribute to the reduction of this debt. Possibly taxation on the new Medicinal Marijuana proposal that has lead to the legalization of marijuana in many states with a great deal of success and new tax dollars.

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 would not support a property tax increase but I do support taxation of legalized marijuana, a casino or a third airport.

**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?

I support the idea that CPS no longer uses a Kindergarten – 8th grade model but consider a middle school system that would drastically reduce the number of schools, cost, and personnel. Several elementary schools in one community could all be feeder schools for one middle school. This would reduce overlapping cost and increase a since of community and achievement,

**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: No

\* 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.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain: I believe their is a need for more police officers hired especially minority officers that reflect the communities they serve. I personally took over 75 African Americans to be tested at the last test date. The reason being to try and bring balance to the current police force that has historically been predominately white dominated. Community policing would then take on a completely different persona with person that have lived in similar blighted and impoverished communities.

What legislation in Springfield would you support to try to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago? I would work with my state legislatures to create legislature that would make it illegal for semi and automatic weapons to be transferred via railroads through communities that have a high history of violence. Recently several semi automatic weapons were stolen from a rail yard in Englewood. These sorts of incidents are of major concern to the safety of the community.

**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: Yes

Please explain: I support a change that would create a hybrid school board of both elected and appointed members. I believe that the Mayor should have discretion in selecting a few to assure that persons that have experience and educational knowledge are included. In addition the community has the right to be represented in educational decisions that affect on their neighborhood.

**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: No

What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program? TIF dollars are supposed to be for economic development in communities. This would allow impoverished and blighted communities an opportunity to reinvest into their communities for a better quality of life. Therefore I would strongly advocate for more community involvement in how these dollars are allocated and spent. There should be Ward meetings dedicated strictly to the spending of these dollars or the reallocation of them for other city services. In addition constituents should be educated on how these dollars are generated.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

My economic plan is trifold:

1. Develop an 800 person employed 24/7 Call Center with daycare, cafeteria and parking. I would approach Chicago based business to contract with the center to answer a specific call (i.e. Southwest lost bags). These will create jobs and a since of community.
2. I would propose a “Restaurant Row” with at least 6 major restaurants that offer family style dining. There is no sit down restaurants in the 17th ward or surrounding areas. These restaurants would create jobs and create traffic flow to the ward that generates more business for local owners.
3. The Safe Block Safe House Project that I initiate with the city would be expanded. This project takes abandon houses: Rehab them using local labor and Youth build to transform these once unsafe properties into affordable living. There are over 4200 such properties in the Southwest side which creates a wealth of opportunity to secure blocks, jobs and reduce crime.

**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 am comfortable with the current size of the council 50. I do not believe representation of the people should ever be reduced. Equal representation is the foundation in which our country was established.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain: Yes if the revenue is geared towards specific reduction in past debt ) i.e. pension funds) and towards future expenditures. How these dollars would be allocated, when they would be allocated and who would be responsible these dollars be allocated is of paramount concern. We don’t need another false representation of new revenue that

was promised by the Lottery.

**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: Yes

Please explain: My concern with the Red light and speed cameras is they seem to disproportionately placed in communities that are blighted and impoverished. I would ask for a study on how and who decides where these cameras are placed and why.

**11) Ward issues**

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

1. City Services – there is an overwhelming since that access and calls for city services have been neglected. I would create a Rapid Response team that address these concerns in a 48 hour period
2. Public Safety – what will we do about the crime, lack of opportunities of young black men and police relations? All of these I have address in previous answers.
3. Jobs, Jobs, Jobs – people need to work, need to be educated to work, and learn skills to get jobs. I address my education and economic development plan in previous answers.