**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

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Ward: 10

Occupation: Accountant

Education: Bachelors in Finance (Roosevelt University)

Previous political and civic experience:

Volunteer for multiple aldermanic campaigns

East Side Little League

* President
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**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:

Please Explain:

Yes, but only with very strong protections for long-time municipal workers and for benefits that have already vested. If we don't reform our pension system soon, we won't

be very far behind the city of Detroit in filing for bankruptcy protection. However,

forcing municipal workers to absorb the brunt of a problem that was not created by them

would be an unfair and improper solution. The right solution to our pension crisis requires that we reform the pension system to make it stable and healthy, but also that we

fix the root cause of the problem to ensure that the solution isn't just another temporary

one. We do this by taking control of the pension system out of the hands of the politicians

and placing it in the hands of the workers, where it belongs, and where it will insure that

investment decisions are based on financial grounds, rather than in exchange for political

gains. I am a strong supporter of the holistic plan proposed by the Illinois Policy Institute,

which will ensure that already earned or accursed pension benefits are fully protected, but

will also raise the minimum retirement age to coincide with the provide sector (excepting

police and fire).

This plan is not a quick fix. The problem was created over decades of mismanagement, it

will take a long-term, responsible plan to fix it. This plan will protect city workers by

ensuring that they have a stable pension system, which they will now control, while at the

same time protecting the taxpayers from having to constantly pay an ever increasing

amount as yet another temporary solution.

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?

As I will say many times throughout my answers this questionnaire, I will not support an increase in taxes on residents of the city of Chicago until we can show them that we’ve taken responsible steps to fix a broken financial system. To put it simply, until we reform the TIF program (see answer to # 6 for more detail on this), and until we cut all fraud waste and abuse out of city departments and city services, I will not support an increase on any taxes that will affect the citizens of Chicago. And even then, I will do everything in my power to prevent taxes unfairly impact the working men and women of Chicago. Many working class families are struggling to feed their families and pay the mortgage as it is, we owe it to find other ways to make up the funding shortfall before we talk about increasing taxes.

**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?

TIFs are stealing money out of the taxing bodies within our property taxes; especially CPS education. Freezing the amount that feeds into education for a 23 year period is a very long time. During this period, inflation is taking place. Costs are going up but the amount feeding into education is fixed. And if economic development increases property taxes within a TIF district then more money is once again being stolen from education and the other taxing bodies. This is money desperately needed to keep the Chicago Teachers’ Pension Fund solvent. Because of this, I suggest that TIF districts in non-blighted areas be terminated and their funds be funneled toward education. We need to focus on keeping the Chicago Teacher’s Pension Fund solvent before starting any new projects with TIF funds. The cuts should not be coming from the CPS budget. Opening new charter schools is not helping the budget deficit that CPS is facing. Part of the reason they are popping up so often is because they know that they do not have to have all the money upfront. CPS needs to stop funding charter schools.

**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:

No. Although, this out of the hands of the city council, as the state legislature

has full control over such an increase, it would affect Chicago residents, so I do have a

strong opinion on it. The last thing the working people of Chicago, the working people of

the 10th Ward need is another tax. The budget problems that the state of Illinois faces are

not dissimilar from those which the city of Chicago faces. The state loses hundreds of

millions of dollars annually through fraud, waste, and abuse. Similarly, the city of

Chicago departments and services could save substantial amounts of money were we to

clean things up. I’m not saying this would be an easy or quick process, but neither would

it be an impossible process. The city of Chicago and the state of Illinois cannot and

should not ask their citizens to carry the burden of a fixing a broken financial system

without first proving to them that the system has been fixed. I cannot in good conscience

ask them to do that, and I will make that clear to the state legislature and to the

constituents of the 10th Ward.

\* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city

Yes or No:

First, I believe that there would be serious constitutional issues with such a

tax. I can assure you that the money that the city makes from such a tax would likely pale

in comparison to the legal fees the city expends on defending the constitutionality of it.

But, more importantly it would be yet another irresponsible, temporary, and insufficient

fix to the overarching problem. I don’t believe in putting Band-Aids on broken arms. We

cannot continue to ignore the systematic failures of our city’s financial system. I would

instead roll-up my sleeves and immediately begin working on cutting all fraud and waste

out of city departments and city services. Any new taxes would be on luxury items, not

on the working man and woman. And only after we can show the people that we’ve taken

responsible steps to fix a broken system.

\* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago’s trading exchanges, known as the “LaSalle Street tax”

Yes or No:

Again, I would not approve any new taxes until we took responsible steps to show that we’ve made drastic improvements to the way we collect and spend current taxes. If you’re behind on your mortgage because you’re going out to eat a steak dinner every night, you don’t go and get a second job to catch up on the mortgage, you stop going out to get steak dinners every night. This is common sense. However, once we can show that we’ve taken sufficient steps to fix the broken system, then the “LaSalle Street tax” is the type of tax increase I would consider, as it wouldn’t place an undue burden on the working people of Chicago.

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: Aside from hiring more officers, enforcement of strategic placement for beat and sector cars is imperative if we want improved response times. This is especially important in the 10th Ward where our neighborhoods are divided by bridges and train tracks which have been known to slow down response times due to passing boats and trains. Criminals listening to police scanners know when beats are left unprotected which leads to strategically timed crimes.

Working with 4th District Deputy Chief Ruiz to make sure our beats are never ignored will be a priority. Making sure that they are equipped with advanced computer analysis which pinpoints specific city blocks where violence is brewing is also a priority. The information from this analysis will be relayed to strategic response units that would saturate the area to dampen violence before it flares.

Much like university campuses, I would like to see emergency posts along our cycling/running paths and in our parks. And if we’re going to spend money on cameras, let them be camera pods for police surveillance.

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

I would support stricter gun laws including a minimum mandatory imprisonment of at least three years for possession of an illegal gun for 1st time offenders and escalating years of sentencing if the gun was used in a robbery, attempted murder or other offense.

**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:

A truly democratic society means we are able to vote and be represented by people whom we voted for. Our current mayor will not let democracy into education. Instead he runs it like a dictatorship. The people of Chicago should have a say in how our schools are run. If the board has the threat of the mayor over them how can we ensure that they are not inflating numbers for the sake of making him look good?

**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?

Yes, absolutely.  Let’s not forget where TIF funds come from to begin with. 100% of TIF funds come out of the coffers of Chicago’s taxing bodies, including the Chicago Public Schools. Because amounts feeding into the taxing bodies are frozen during the life of a TIF district, one can say that a majority of the money is stolen from CPS since the increment is reserved for the TIF fund. Maybe not directly, but it is money that would have gone to the taxing bodies, CPS included, were it not for the TIF program. We need to stop pretending that CPS is trying to divert TIF money in order to use it for its own financial shortcomings, without admitting that TIF took the money from CPS first.

Granted, the pension crisis and budget deficit that CPS is currently facing is not a direct result of the TIF program, but you cannot deny that it wasn’t a major contributing factor. Also “new” taxes from new developments created by TIF will feed into the TIF fund. At this point in time, between all the different TIF accounts, we’re talking about 2 billion dollars. Much of that money would have gone to CPS were it not for the TIF program. And 200 million to 500 million of that money is currently not being used or slated to be used?

In response to questions like this one, the current administration repeatedly responds that CPS should have done a better job budgeting and that the state should be more responsible in funding education. Finger pointing that ignores the reality of what the TIF program is and what the TIF program does. It takes money away from the schools that Chicago’s citizens desperately need, to pay for a lot of things that Chicago’s citizens really don’t want.

But, to be completely clear, I believe the TIF program “concept” is great and when properly implemented, can do a lot of good for blighted neighborhoods, something that the 10th Ward’s neighborhoods can benefit greatly from. The problem is that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, it is just very poorly managed. But setting that to the side for now, we can look at the question at hand. I would love for the Mayor to present the following question to the voters of Chicago: “We’re taking money from neighborhood schools to pay for public programs and private development, but not all of that money is used up at the end of each year, should we some of it go back to the schools?”

I’m sure he would get a lot of looks that would imply that he is crazy for even asking such a question. The answer is Yes! Absolutely! Not only should some of that money go back, but most of it should! The administration has claimed to give back 25% of uncommitted funds, but in reality that number is likely much closer to 10% after the Mayor’s administration runs its “calculations.” I would push for as much as 90% of uncommitted funds to be given back to CPS and the other taxing bodies, keeping 10% as a just-in-case. Failing to invest in the education of our children, and not even for funded projects, but for projects that “may” be funded in the future, is socially, ethically, and morally reprehensible.

**What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program?**

First, I would sponsor an ordinance creating an immediate moratorium on any new TIF districts or expansion of existing ones. I would argue that any private development where ground isn’t broken yet should be immediately halted, and if we can still responsibly get out of providing the TIF funds for that development, then we should do so. Next, and I think most importantly, the reform I would push for would be complete transparency of the TIF program workings and budgeting. This administration has done everything in its power to run the program behind closed doors. That is absolutely unacceptable to me and to the citizens of Chicago.

No matter what side of the argument you fall on, everyone can agree that the TIF program in Chicago is broken and needs to be fixed. If something is broken you stop and fix it before continuing to move forward. And with the budget and pension crisis we are currently facing, continuing to spend on hotels and arenas will quickly put us in the position that the city of Detroit found itself in prior to filing for bankruptcy protection. The average Chicagoan understands that you don’t go shopping for a new luxury car when you’re 6 months behind on the mortgage. The city council and mayor should understand that as well.

In addition, I as more fully discussed above, I would push for 90% of all uncommitted funds should be “surplused” back to the taxing bodies every year. Once these steps are implemented, I would push for an audit of all current TIF programs and TIF funds. I believe that the TIF program has far strayed from what it was originally intended to do, and that many of the current TIF districts were created unnecessarily or improperly. In those instances, I would push for those TIF districts to be ended early and all uncommitted funds to be returned to the taxing bodies. Finally, for TIF districts that are proper and necessary, I would sponsor an ordinance requiring that at least half of the funds from that TIF must be committed to projects chosen via participatory budgeting. If you are taking money away from a community for the alleged benefit of that community, who better to decide how those funds are applied than the members of that community.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

The 10th ward offers a unique benefit we can call the three R’s: Railroad, Rivers and

Roads. As a community built at the helm of the Steel Mills, the 10th ward seeks to

reintroduce itself as a beacon of economic and community development. By presenting companies with packages that include Federal, State and Municipal tax credits, I look toward bringing much needed jobs that will offer our residents stability and enhance community growth. I would also seek out companies that understand that tax incentives are just that, an incentive to offer the 10th ward growth but also ensuring that our residents are paid living wages. Local jobs also offer an economic influx to just the community where business reside but also the city overall. By safeguarding long-term employment, our residents can freely support our local small businesses and larger businesses in the area. Having jobs close to home includes an additional benefit in better work-life balance, shorter commutes gives our residents time to engage in their neighborhood schools, churches, youth programming and other organizations while building an environment of safety, stability and success.

**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 believe the city can legislate with a much reduced city council. If a larger city like Los Angeles can, so can Chicago. Also, it is one of many ways to trim the budget and reduce our deficit. A reduced city council means fewer candidates, fewer petition challenges and less taxpayer dollars spent on elections. City Council should be reduced to a number that can efficiently legislate without compromising the representation of its constituents.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

People are going to enjoy gaming regardless whether it is in Indiana or surrounding suburbs. If Chicagoans are going to visit a casino then why lose revenue to casinos outside of Chicago. As an added bonus, a casino will help to reduce the budget deficit.

**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: These lights were supposed to increase safety by strategically placing them around schools and parks. However some of these lights are not justified by schools and parks. Instead, they seem to be placed where revenue can best be generated. And contrary to its supposed intent, studies have shown that they have been counterproductive causing vehicular accidents.

**11) Ward issues**

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

For most people, crime/safety is the top priority. It is the one topic that affects everyone to some degree whether it is first or second priority. No one wants to see defacing of property or a littered neighborhood. No one wants their home or vehicle broken into. And to a higher degree, no one wants to lose a loved one to shootings and stabbings. No one does.

Education/youth programming ranks second. Why? It is crime/safety prevention. Attacking the problem at its source before it becomes a problem is key. We cannot lose our kids to the streets. Presenting resources to our youth is giving them the opportunity to excel today *and* tomorrow.

Unemployment/economic development fell at a respectable third place. I have lumped economic development and unemployment because there is a strong correlation among them. Economic development in my ward will help drive down unemployment on a local level.