**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Olga Bautista

Ward: 10th

Occupation: Community organizer, environmental activist, immigrants rights activist.

Education: Olive Harvey College

Previous political and civic experience:

Although I have never before held public office, I have served my community in a wide variety of ways over decades. I have provided guidance and training to hundreds of undocumented immigrants so as to integrate them into our community. I was one of the leading organizers of the historic mass marches for immigrant rights in 2008. I have served on Local School Councils. I was one of the initiators of the Ban Petcoke movement. I have been involved with dozens of civic organizations including Local School Councils, organizations of retired steelworkers, seniors groups, youth centers and in supporting local arts and cultural activities.

**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: **No**

Please Explain:

Police and firefighters deserve their full, earned pensions. The city needs to restore to the available public treasury the millions of dollars in TIF funds that have been handed to developers. Few permanent, well- paying jobs have accompanied these projects and in many cases, such as the massive, 30 – 40 year Lakeside Development in my ward. In that case, the owners/developers have refused thus far to even come to the table to negotiate a community benefits agreement. So far, $108 million in TIF funds have gone to that project alone. Far more than that has been allocated to the big banks and investors who profit from such projects—money that should be re-allocated to meeting Chicago’s pension obligations.

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 support such an increase only if it primarily targeted wealthy property owners and not struggling, working class homeowners. Generally, however, the revenue for fully funding our pension systems should, as discussed above, be re-directed away from TIF handouts.

**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?

See Response to Question No. 1, above.

**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.** The sales tax is generally, a regressive tax that primarily burdens poor and working class families. Instead, the state needs to close all corporate tax loopholes, raise corporate tax rates and otherwise shift the burden to those most able to afford it.

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

Yes or No: **No.** This would be a divisive and unfair burden on non-Chicago residents who work here. Let’s not forget that by being employed here, these workers are an integral part of the economic infrastructure of Chicago who contribute to the City in many ways already and should not now be taxed simply because they live outside the city limits.

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

Yes or No: **Yes.** I favor such a tax. It would add billions of dollars to the City.

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**, but…

Please explain:

I would support hiring more police but only to replace retiring officers and only if the hiring process includes a rigorous screening, training and disciplinary protocol that addresses questions of police excessive force. Crime must be—and can be—eliminated at the roots, which, overwhelmingly reflect endemic poverty, lack of opportunity, especially for young people, lack of skills training and comprehensive cultural, recreational and public service programs to create real alternatives to the drugs, guns, violence and crime that is virtually all that is left to Chicago’s most impoverished wards, including my own. The community must have direct input to the oversight and accountability of the police in the neighborhoods. A fully independent civilian review board with subpoena power and other stringent measures must be implemented to prevent needless deaths at the hands of police.

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

Although I am not aware of a specific piece of legislation that has been introduced and would favor strict enforcement of existing laws, I would support changes to the civil and criminal justice system that would make it easier to bring wrongful death and other claims against gun manufacturers who are the real source of the problem. It is well documented that the industry manufactures guns that it knows full well will go directly into illicit markets. The industry does little or nothing to track the course of its products into the stream of commerce and extra-legal routes into our poorest communities. I would like to see continued banning of military-style assault weapons and legislation that requires guns to be engineered and manufactured such that they cannot be fired by anyone other than their legal, licensed owners, technology that exists today, but which manufacturers are reluctant to incorporate on a comprehensive basis because they fear such changes would cut into the volume of guns sold and, therefore, reduce their profits.

**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:

This is a question on of fundamental fairness and democracy; of eliminating the corrupt interplay between the appointees who now direct Chicago Public Schools and the host of businesses, bondholders, banks, contractors and investors who have profited. An elected school board is about direct accountability, community-level input. An elected school board would go a long way in putting the focus back on students and teachers, on quality education for all children and away from the lucrative business, contracting and real estate profiteering that characterizes the current arrangement.

**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?

I am generally opposed to the entire TIF program as currently operated. I would require comprehensive Community Benefits Agreements (CBA’s) in the form of binding contracts and obligations imposed on the recipients of TIF funds to guarantee job training, permanent union-scale paid employment to the members of the community in which TIF-funded projects are based. All segments—not just the business components-of the community should be parties to the creation, negotiation and enforcement of such agreements, as should the City of Chicago. There should be both civil and criminal penalties for breaches of such CBA’s and no work of any kind should be allowed to be undertaken until and unless the CBA is signed.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

As a part of the once thriving Southeast Side, the 10th Ward today suffers in the aftermath of the shutdown of the steel and related industries. The 10th ward suffers from widespread poverty and joblessness. We need a massive public works jobs program to build new homes, rehabilitate existing homes and retrofit them as green, energy conserving spaces; clean up and develop the acres of toxic dumping grounds that proliferate in the ward;

I will press for the creation of such a program and seek to have this area declared an economic and environmental disaster area eligible for federal funds. I will work to withdraw the over $108 million in TIF funds now allocated to Lakeside Development’s speculative 30 -30 year project on the site of the former U.S. Steel South Works and halt all work until the owners/developers sign a comprehensive Community Benefits Agreement guaranteeing current residents of the impacted neighborhoods with thousands of permanent, skilled jobs at union-scale wages in both the construction and operation of Lakeside.

I will work for a complete ban on petcoke in Chicago—as was done in Detroit and San Francisco-- including the shutdown of the KCBX facility. Whether it is open or “enclosed”, petroleum coke is a toxin that we cannot afford. The “enclosed” state of the art facility that is backed by Alderman Pope and Rahm Emmanuel is a fraud that will bring no permanent new jobs to our residents, but will bring plenty of pollution. This is because the new facility—when it is finally built—will be able to process more petcoke than ever before, loading it onto uncovered barges, railroad cars and trucks where it will continue to blow into our homes and into the lungs of our seniors and children. This is not economic development. The 83-acres that KCBX sits on is already designated as an area for small business, retail, light manufacturing and other genuine sources of safe jobs and public benefit.

**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 would reduce the number of City council members to no more than 15. This would not only safe a significant amount of money with fewer elections, but more importantly would mean councilmanic districts that would be geographically larger and, therefore, more diverse. This would go a long way in reducing divisions in our City and help people think along the lines of common problems and solutions.

Fewer councilmen would also mean more transparency as Chicagoans could more easily exercise civilian oversight with a small number of City Council members. Right now, many alderman act like princes of their fiefdoms and cultivate and reward loyal supporters at the expense of more marginalized members of the community. The City of Los Angeles—the second-largest city in terms of population spread over a huge geographical region—has a 15-member City Council—we don’t need to have over three times that number here.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: **No**

Please explain:

This is not a productive use of resources. At best casinos provide low-paying, unstable and often demeaning jobs to a relatively small number of people in an industry that profits from the hardships and hopes of people who are often desperate.

Not only in social costs, but in diverting funds away from projects that could mean genuine vocational training and permanent, productive jobs.

**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: The current number of such cameras is unacceptable because we don’t need these cameras at all, let alone new ones. Recent studies of have shown these cameras to be unreliable and their effectiveness in reducing accidents questionable. It would appear—again—that public funds are going to enrich this particular industry with little or no justification.

I believe that there are other, more effective ways of curbing dangerous driving are available. I would support creation of a large civilian traffic patrol, an expanded version of the traditional school crossing guard function. These would not be police officers, but monitors of compliance who could act as deterrents to violators and call/assist police where necessary. When residents see people they know performing this function, there will be the element of community control over the safety of its streets. Arrangements for night patrols could be made as well. Funds for such patrols could be come from the savings derived from abandoning the red light/speed cameras and reducing police department overtime, among other sources. Thousands of now-unemployed members of the community could be put to work helping to make their communities safer.

**11) Ward issues**

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

1. Jobs—we need a massive public works, job training and socially useful employment opportunities in the 10th Ward. The city of Chicago should stop handing millions of dollars to big developers whose promises of jobs are illusory and unsupported by the history of these publicly subsidized sources of private wealth.
2. Environmental degradation and risks to health—the 10th Ward already suffers from legacy toxins from the steel mills and other now-shuttered industry. We live in a cancer cluster and our children and seniors are subjected to petcoke, coal dust, poisonous runoff and air pollution from still-remaining dirty industries.
3. Housing- hundreds of homes have been foreclosed, particularly in the area immediately surrounding the old U.S. Steel site, and much of the remaining housing stock is dangerously in need of upgrading. The City of Chicago itself owns almost 100 lots in the 10th Ward which should be provided to the community to expand affordable housing and not sitting idle for Lakeside Development to take over.