**Name:** McStephen O. A. “Max” Solomon

**District running for:** 19th Senate District

**Political party:** Dem

**Political/civic background:** Trustee, Grande Prairie Public Library Dist. of Cook County. Local Board Member, Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), Chicago. Volunteer attorney, Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago.

**Occupation:** Attorney, College Professor, Actor.

**Education:** J.D. – Valparaiso University School of Law

 M.A./M.Th. – Valparaiso University

 B.A. (Political Science) – DePaul University.

 A.A. (Political Science) – South Suburban College

**Campaign website:** maxsenate.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. I do not hold that Illinois has a revenue problem. Rather, Illinois has a spending/debt problem due to years of legislators ignoring Illinois’ Constitutional requirement for a balanced budget.

Furthermore, Illinois’ pension problem must be fixed to free up additional funds, up to and including amending Art. XIII, Section 5 of the Illinois Constitution. Some of the provisions of the Pension Reform Package contained in Gov. Rauner’s Turnaround Agenda are good and reasonable starting points.

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)

Yes, absolutely. Illinois needs pension reform. Government has grown too big, and continues to do so. Thus, as stated in the answer to the question above, a pension reform must include an amendment to the Constitution in order for that reform to be permanent and sustainable.

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, absolutely. Nothing in the Constitution calls for the consent of legislative leaders for the General Assembly to pass a budget. Besides, legislative leaders, namely, currently, Mr. Madigan and Mr. Cullerton are both elected members of the legislature. They should get no special treatment.

**Education:**

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

A)

“The State has the primary responsibility for financing the system of public education.” Illinois Constitution Art. X, Section 1.

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)

As cited above, education (to K12) is the special province and responsibility of the State. Therefore, Chicago (or any other School District) should not, and should not have been, treated any differently from any other within the State. Any policy, including pension and any pension contribution formula, must be uniform and applied uniformly across the State.

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)

In addition to free education “through secondary level,” the Illinois Constitution allows for “such other free education as the General Assembly provides by law.” Art. X, Section 1. Thus, in a solvent, fiscally responsible, and prosperous Illinois, I would support that public higher education be free too – at least through community college level. However, the current state of our State cannot even begin to entertain or sustain that.

It is unfortunate that the Monetary Award Program and the hardworking Illinois students who rely on it are now being held hostage to the failure of Illinois Legislators to pass a budget. That needs to be addressed and fixed without further delay.

**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)

Again, I do not hold that Illinois has a revenue problem. Rather, Illinois has a spending/debt problem, including “fund sweeps,” and “diversions” of our tax dollars. These are the problems that need to be addressed. There are revenues already dedicated to Illinois’ infrastructure needs. We must use appropriated funds for their purposes.

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)

As is, this seems reasonable to me. So, yes, Illinois should create a reliable funding stream for capital cost. However, such funding stream must remain dedicated to its purposes and must not be “swept” or “diverted.”

**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)

In no particular order:

1. Cut or freeze corporate taxes to competitive rates
2. Tort reform, including worker’s compensation
3. Encourage and incentivize manufacturing-based careers, courses/training in colleges and universities.

**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)

 Support – contingent upon hearing/learning more about this issue.

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)

 Support/Support – contingent upon hearing/learning more about this issue.

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)

I support creation of a cap-and-trade program. No carbon tax. The revenue from such “carbon tax”, as usual, may be subject to “fund sweeps” and “diversions.”

**Gun safety:**

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

A)

The first part of this question is both vague and broad. However, I do support limiting straw gun purchases.

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

A)

I support the current federal licensing (FFL) for all firearms dealers.

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

A)

This appears, on its face, to be a common-sense approach to reducing gun violence. However, my support for this will turn on a clear legal definition and clarification of what constitutes a “crisis.”

**Criminal justice:**

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

A)

Support.

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)

Support/Support

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)

All crimes? No.

However, our current expungement/sealing laws need reviewing, especially the new “all or nothing” requirement for expungements.

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)

Support.

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)

I will be in favor of a proposal to end the placement of juveniles on the state’s sex offender registry.

For adult sex offenders, I will be in favor of “delivery of rehabilitation therapy,” but not on tax payers’ dime.

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

A)

I support the current appointment/retention system for judges.

**Other:**

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

A)

Strongly support.

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

A)

There are several proposals in the Workers Compensation reform section within the Economic Competitiveness and Job Growth Package contained in Gov. Rauner’s Turnaround Agenda that I find as good-faith, non-partisan/bi-partisan conversation starters towards a true and sustainable solution to Illinois’ problems.

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

A)

I support automatic voter registration only if it accounts for the citizenship status of voters before they are registered. As an attorney who practices Immigration Law, I know that automatic voter registration may pose as a potential trap for innocent and hardworking documented non-citizens to break the law, thereby foreclosing any chances or possibility of them becoming U.S. Citizens. Federal law forbids non-citizens – including legal, documented, permanent residents – from registering and voting in elections. A permanent resident who is automatically registered to vote will inadvertently break that law.

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

A)

Term limits for all State legislators. Term limits for leadership positions in the General Assembly.

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 father was the most important teacher in my life. My strong commitment to education is the path that has led me to where I am today in life. That path was laid and strongly instilled in me early in life by my father, who himself was an educator. He taught me both life and academic lessons. Although he died when I was 17, I never departed from that path.