

## 2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Jedidiah Brown

Ward: 5<sup>th</sup>

Occupation: Senior Pastor of Chosen Generation

Education: Ordained Pastor

Previous political and civic experience: National president of a community organization (Young Leaders Alliance) that works in anti-violence, restorative justice, and social justice.

### 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 do support the restructuring of the pension system but how that is done is the million dollar question? Mayor Emmanuel has said that the city can't afford the \$550 million payment due at the end of 2015.**

**Our fire fighters and policemen/women risk their lives every day for us and we should not reduce their benefits. I'm not sure just how that can happen. A beginning is to have more discussion about the multiplier being used to formulate the pension funding which has not been increased since 1982. Consequently, the money has stayed flat with this kind of system in place. Another discussion which needs more consideration is the percentages that employees pay as well as employers. Comparing what employees pay into their pensions in private and public sectors and what employers pay into each is another area which needs further discussion. Social Security ceiling benefits and Government employee benefits are starkly different.**

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 a temporary property**

**tax increase to sufficiently fund the fire and police pensions with an end date attached to it with definitive solution by the end of the temporary property tax deadline that would insure the solvency of the pension fund going forward.**

## **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? **An evaluation of how much employees pay into the pension fund and a actuarial analysis is needed looking at the age of the work force and coming up with a plan that has a graduated scale for premiums based on age of the employee.**

## **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: **Depends on which consumer services would be taxed**

\* 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. **Non Chicago residents contribute daily to the commerce in Chicago by buying goods and services in Chicago.**

## **4) Crime**

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

Yes or No:

Please Explain: **I support hiring more police officers after a plan of action is developed for the neighborhoods they will serve in. To hire police officers thinking that their presence alone will deter crime is not sensible and will not yield the results that are intended. Instead, partnerships with community residents and local businesses would be more effective with neighborhood policing. Having meetings with residents and getting support is something that I could support.**

What legislation in Springfield would you support to try to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago? **I support legislation that would require more stringent background checks for people applying for gun registration. We need national data bases that mental hospitals and mental health facilities are required to update regularly with patients that have severe mental conditions which would be identified by mental health professionals and voted on by the legislators after proper hearings.**

## **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 members and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

Yes or No: **Yes**

Please explain: **I support switching Chicago to an elected school board because when people have to run for office I think they take their jobs more seriously as it comes with a clear set of policies instituted by the Illinois School Board Association as well as The Illinois Department of Education. Probably unintended, the Chicago school board appointments gives the perception that favoritism and rubber stamping is taking place between the mayor and those he appoints.**

## 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, I do support increasing the annual TIF surplus that the mayor and the City Council have declared, however, in addition to the money going to schools and other agencies more money should also be allocated for struggling communities with plans to reduce violence, increase business opportunities and training programs should also be given a portion of surplus TIF money.**

What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program? TIF's was created to spark economic development in blighted areas. **In Chicago, what constitutes "blighted" seems to frequently change. Often times a vacant lot in the middle of downtown Chicago is considered "blighted" which wealthy developers reap benefits that they may not necessarily need. Also, we need better accountability for developers who benefit from TIF funding that Chicago residents are getting a percentage of employment on all construction and other projects. The percentage of residents should be documented and monitored on a consistent basis and stiff fines should be implemented for developers who have been found to be in non compliance.**

## 7) Neighborhood economic development

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

**I would create jobs by exploring getting high growth industries in the ward. STEM, specifically green energy renovation is an area that can produce high paying jobs for Chicago residents. Green energy renovation jobs make homes and businesses more energy efficient. Once I become Alderman, my plan is to have a business summit where I bring businesses in the community to have a roundtable discussion on how we can boost economic development. I plan to also have the University of Chicago be a part of the summit so that they can help us develop a strategic plan and track implementation and outcomes.**

## 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 can't provide a specific number of how many**

**Aldermen are needed in the city of Chicago without first doing an analysis of how many constituents are in each Alderman's ward. In addition, I would also need to look at the need in each of the wards. Some wards have a greater need than others. Without having that information I couldn't quantify how many.**

### **9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No:

**Please explain: It would depend on what the city would use for the revenue generated from the casino. If the money would be used for business development in the wards, beautification projects in communities, more funding for early childhood education, and helping to pay down the debt for the police and fire pensions, I could support a casino.**

### **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:

**I support responsible measures to protect pedestrians, especially our children, from drivers who recklessly disobey our speed laws. With that, it is apparent that the red light and speed camera programs are used to squeeze Chicago taxpayers for additional revenue. I believe the City of Chicago can find a middle ground where we can hold reckless drives accountable thereby protecting our residents without nickel and dimming thousands of other drivers.**

### **11) Ward issues**

What are the top three issues in your ward — the ones you talk about most on the campaign trail? **People not feeling safe, unemployment and underemployment and underfunded neighborhood schools.**