

# Sun Times Survey

Name: **Casey Urlacher**

District running for: **26th State Senate District**

Political party: **Republican**

Political/civic background: **Mayor of Mettawa and Illinois Civil Service Commission Board Member**

Occupation: **Director of Development for Englewood Construction Company**

Education: **Lake Forest College, B.A. in Business Administration**

Campaign website: **[www.caseyurlacher.net](http://www.caseyurlacher.net)**

## **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 – **Oppose**
2. Expand sales tax to services – **Oppose**
3. Tax retirement income in excess of \$50,000 – **Oppose**
4. Adopt a progressive income tax – **Oppose**

*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) Cuts to our state budget especially in areas of education, public health and infrastructure are tough calls. However, Illinois has reached a dire budget crisis and cuts will be a necessary step to take to get our checkbook balanced.**

**For at least 20 years, the lack of long term fiscal planning compounded by the lack of short-term fiscal restraint forces Illinois to make drastic cuts in state spending or face bankruptcy. Specific cuts that I would examine include ensuring the Medicaid reform SMART Act reforms, which were passed in 2012, are fully implemented. Medicaid takes up nearly a quarter of the state budget; it would be impossible to balance our budget without taking a look at this program. Since the reforms passed in 2012, the Democrat controlled legislature could not help themselves and systematically began to roll back these necessary reforms. In addition, we must continue to scrub our rolls to determine Medicaid eligibility. Allowing these Medicaid reforms to be fully implemented will save the state substantial funds.**

**Other options for cuts include across the board cuts in certain grant programs, like former Governor Pat Quinn's anti-violence program, that were expanded by the last two Democrat Governors to secure political support for their re-elections.**

**Honestly an overall review of the entire budget needs to be taken. No program should be immediately dismissed. For example, look at the DuQuoin State Fair.**

**Why should we have two fairs? I fully believe the State Fair is important to showcase the importance of agriculture to our state; however, one State Fair in Springfield would suffice. We should explore the option of having a public private partnership for the state fair.**

**We must also try again to find a constitutionally sound way to fix the pension system which has approximately 110 billion dollars in debt. This is critical to begin addressing our budget hole. One out of every four dollars taken from taxpayers by the state goes into a system that is giving more than 11,000 government retirees tax-free, six-figure pensions worth as much as, in one case, \$450,000 per year.**

**We should re-institute negotiations with public pension employee stakeholders to reach a reasonable compromise (within the legal framework provided by recent court rulings) which makes the pension system for current employees sustainable through their lifetimes.**

**Moving forward, I support the placement of all newly hired public employees into a 401k-retirement system plan. Just as in the private sector, defined benefit retirement plans have proven to be unsustainable and have been scuttled in favor 401k plans. Given the current condition of the government controlled public employee pensions, no new employee in their right mind should trust the state government to manage the money they need to support themselves in their old age.**

**Overall, I believe the Illinois government has a spending and borrowing problem, which is directly impacting the sustainability of the Illinois economy if our government spending is not immediately curtailed. We need to make it easier for businesses to succeed and thrive in Illinois; a recent Wall Street Journal report stated Illinois was the 3rd worst state in the country for businesses to operate. We need to provide stability to our businesses to trust in our state. This will entail passing reforms to make Illinois competitive with other states in worker's compensation insurance costs, and streamlining business regulations. I am willing to roll up my sleeves and do the work to get Illinois onto a fiscally balanced path.**

**Here is what the 2011 state income tax increase that brought in over 30 billion dollars accomplished: backlog of bills was slightly reduced, the pension crisis worsened, the credit rating went down, interest payments went up, and we it did not improve our standing as the worst state in the Midwest for employment and businesses to locate.**

**Q) Do you support another legislative attempt at pension reform? If so, which proposed changes in the pensions system would you support that you believe would pass constitutional muster?**

**A) We must examine the "consideration proposal" that is still being discussed in Springfield. This model offers a financial incentive for workers who volunteer to move out of the state's most expensive pension plan, with the goal of achieving much-needed long-term savings. We should also give local governments the ability to declare bankruptcy in the absolute direst scenarios.**

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) This concept sounds interesting. Without having more details, I would say that it certainly sounds like something I could support. Our elected leaders need to care more about everyday solutions than short-term partisan advantages. The consolidation of power in the legislature into the hands of the 2 top leaders only continues to perpetuate the power struggles and short-term thinking which has dominated and fostered our current dilemmas and broken system.**

## **Education:**

Q. What, if anything, should we do to change how we fund schools.

**A) Illinois cannot afford to under perform in education. We must provide the core foundation for our children to be well educated and have a thriving future.**

**Obviously there is no easy solution. I would support a review of the current school formula. However, I do not support a new formula, which shifts money from the suburbs to other areas of the state. The suburban districts already receive very little state aid. It is unfair to cut the little they receive.**

**Our one-size fits all education system does not work for a state as diverse as Illinois. We need to ensure our students graduate ready for college. Education dollars should follow the child thus ensuring parents have greater say in how education funds are spent. We need to promote more partnerships with post-secondary education institutions by offering additional dual-credit and technical education programs as well as increased career exploration opportunities.**

**In addition, we must eliminate school mandates that drive up needless costs. Programs the state imposes on school districts without any additional funding are a source of our school funding problems. Illinois imposes well over 100 mandates on our districts. While these mandates are put in place with good intentions, we must take the tough vote to bring relief from these mandates, saving schools the possibility of up to \$200 million annually. These are dollars that would be much better invested in our children in the classroom. Locally elected school boards should decide what mandates are appropriate.**

**I also believe that school consolidation must become a reality. While I recognize this is a difficult task to accomplish, we must ask ourselves what is more important – maintaining the broken status quo or eliminating bureaucracy and investing additional dollars into our kids? There are over 850 school districts in Illinois; we should target consolidating where possible and when feasible.**

Q) DO you favor state picking up pension costs for Chicago teachers...? DO you favor school districts outside Chicago picking up their own pension costs, as Chicago does now?

**A) No**

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)

1. **At this current time with Illinois clearly in dire budget straights, I cannot in good faith support an increase in our budget deficit. I do not support adding any further tax burden to our constituents. I believe higher education is critical for our children and the state's future; therefore, I am absolutely not closing the door towards increasing higher education funding in the future. In fact, as soon as we right our budget ship, I consider it to be one of my top priorities.**
2. **Our public universities and community colleges could increase their focus on workforce development. Business and academic leaders need to come together to develop strong partnerships. These partnerships will serve to help both the business community and the academia community to flourish. This would likely need to start with a regional approach, assessing the needs of an area's high-demand workforce and a sector of focus. An interesting program in New York is developing a business-higher education collaboration which would produce insights and materials such as new courses, micro-credentials for business, new models for engaging women and underrepresented minorities in emerging fields, and effective transfer agreements between two-year and four-year institutions.**

## **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) **Between our extensive highway system and inter-modal systems, Illinois is a major transportation hub. We must keep pace with our infrastructure needs for business and commuters, or our economy will suffer. Deferring maintenance on our roads will increase the backlog, and the cost of paying for projects will continue to escalate. We should also aggressively pursue innovative ways to fund our needs such as public private partnerships. But any additional funding should supplement existing budget dollars and not turn into a shell game like the Illinois Lottery and education funding**

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) **I do not support an income tax increase; however, if a Democrat tax increase does become reality, then I would like to see a certain portion of that increase be dedicated to capital costs.**

## **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)**

**1. We need to bring back an economically stable business environment. For example, in recent years the state has allowed the research and development tax credit, the graphic arts tax credit, and the Manufacturers Purchase credit to all sunset or expire. In addition, the “EDGE” credit is set to expire at the end of this year. Powerful leaders artificially place these short sunset dates into law in order to ensure that business must come back to the legislature begging for an extension. This only fosters an uncertainty, which is unattractive in keeping and retaining jobs.**

**2. One of the main considerations of businesses is workers’ compensation costs and its crippling rate structure. Illinois has the highest workers’ compensation rates in the Midwest. We need to lower it to be more in line with states like Indiana whose workers’ compensation costs are more than 100% lower than Illinois per 100 dollars covered by the payroll. Specifically, we must look at various reforms into the factors that determine workers’ compensation payments like defining the workplace as a major contributing cause of an injury or “causation”, clearly defining a traveling employee, and allowing employers more input in the selection of medical providers.**

**3. Reform the “EDGE” program, which is set to sunset at the end of 2016. This is the time to take on this reform, and ensure that we do not end 2016 without economic development tools in our tool belt in order to retain and attract new businesses of every size and type. I would couple this with reorganizing Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity as a public private partnership, between government, business, and labor with the primary mission of creating economic opportunities in Illinois, promoting innovation, and partnering with regional agencies.**

## **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?*

*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) The two above questions are not mutually exclusive. It is my understanding the negotiations are still continuing on both of these bills. In my opinion, in order for Illinois to meet its' goals of the clean power plan, the state will likely need to adopt a policy that continues to promote an all of the above energy policy portfolio. We need to ensure the viability of our nuclear fleet while investing in other energy generation in a way where Illinois will continue to be a leader in creating jobs in these fields with a goal of keeping energy costs as low as possible for business and residential ratepayers.**

*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) No, I do not support a cap-and-trade program or a carbon tax.**

### **Gun Safety:**

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

**A) No, Illinois already has tough licensing guidelines for a person purchasing or selling a firearm in the state. Everyone selling a gun, either privately or commercially, must perform a background check on potential buyers. In addition, Illinois is the only state to require all gun owners obtain a FOID card.**

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

**A) No, Illinois has some of the toughest regulations in place yet Chicago has one of the highest murder rates as a result of a gun in the country. We require background checks for all gun show firearm sales and individual sellers at gun shows must register FOID cards same as any other seller. Private parties who sell guns outside of shows are required to verify the validity of the buyer's FOID card with state police and keep a record of sale for 10 years. The reality is criminals and terrorists don't buy guns at gun shows or from collectors they buy them on the black market.**

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

**A) Yes**

### **Criminal Justice:**

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

**A) I support transparency of records.**

*Q) Do you support the goal of reducing the 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 disable prisoners predicated on an assessment of risk to public safety prior to release?*

**A) Yes, I support the goal of reducing the adult prison population by 25% by 2025. I support sentencing reform such as reducing or eliminating prison terms for non-violent drug offenses. We need to pass safe and effective criminal justice laws, which focus on reducing the recidivism rate. Don't get me wrong, I fully believe that if a person commits a violent crime or are harmful for society, they must absolutely do the time. However, some first-time lower-level criminals should have the opportunity to be placed into effective rehabilitation and probation programs. We should start by closely examining the recent recommendations of the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice Sentencing Reform recommendations. Yes, I would support the early release of aged and disabled prisoners predicated on an assessment risk to public safety prior to release and also predicated on appropriate safety standards being in place.**

*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) The word "all" makes me say no. There are some crimes that just cannot be considered for expungement and sealing, such as molestation or crimes of pedophiles.**

*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) Yes, this makes financial sense. My end goal for youth violators is that they have the opportunity to redeem themselves and become productive members of society.**

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

**A) Yes, while merit selection is not a system that will ensure the total elimination of politics from judicial selection, it will minimize political influence by eliminating the need for candidates to raise funds, advertise and compromise judicial independence due to special interest influence.**

*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 do not support legislation that would help pedophiles. There is nothing worse for a child than do have their youthful innocence taken from them by a sexual deviant. I could not live with myself if I voted to ease the regulations on a sex offender and then learn that molester harmed a child.**

### **Other:**

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

**A) Yes it is time for a fair, nonpartisan redistricting process where legislative districts are drawn to best represent residents instead of the current partisan process where legislators control the pen to draw their own districts for political gain.**

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

**A) Illinois has the highest workers' compensation rates in the Midwest. We need to lower it to be more in line with states like Indiana whose comp costs are more than 100% lower than Illinois per 100 dollars covered by the payroll. Specifically, we must look at various reforms in the factors that determine workers' compensation payments like defining the workplace as a major contributing cause of an injury or "causation", clearly defining a traveling employee, and allowing employers more input in the selection of medical providers.**

**As for tort reform, Illinois needs to level the playing field and fix our broken lawsuit system, as we are rated 46th out 50th in the nation for our lawsuit environment. Illinois needs to limit the practice of venue shopping which allows for the manipulation of the system filing lawsuits in courts based on where plaintiffs are most likely to win, regardless of where injuries actually occurred. In addition, limits should be placed upon trial lawyers targeting wealthy businesses and individuals who may have had significantly less involvement in causing the injury.**

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

**A) With the ease people have today in registering whether it be traveling a few blocks to their village hall or stopping at one of the many voter registration sites to going on-line there is no excuse for not registering. People, who cannot make a commitment to take a few minutes to register when brave soldiers made the ultimate commitment with their lives to defend our right to vote, do not deserve a law that automatically registers them.**

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

**A) I support reasonable limits on campaign contributions in Illinois politics. Money has corrupted Illinois politics. My answer to those who claim limits on campaign contributions are unconstitutional infringement of the freedom of speech I say: free speech is valueless if it can't be heard. A one million dollar contribution from Joe the hedge fund manager permits his candidate of choice to speak 10,000 times louder and more often than a thousand dollar contribution from Joe the plumber to his candidate of choice. If truly we embrace the principle of freedom of speech, we should embrace the principle all voices have the right to be heard equally. Without contribution limits voices cannot be equally heard.**

**As for ethics, we need to consider legislation which implements a strong revolving door preventing high-ranking government employees from parlaying their positions into lucrative lobbying gigs. In addition, legislators need to have a one-year hiatus from the legislative process before they can become a lobbyist. Our leaders should not be spending their final days in office negotiating lobbying contracts. This is particularly true when often the most critical votes taken, such as the income tax increase, are taken those last few days of the lame duck veto session.**

*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) I had many wonderful teachers and coaches who served as mentors and role models. However, like many who look back on their education there is that one teacher that stands out above the rest. For me that teacher was Lake Forest College Professor Les Dlabay. He teaches Business and Economics with an emphasis on**

marketing. His door was always open to his students. Most important, he prodded me to get outside of my comfort zone and to look beyond the easy and obvious answers and to think more analytical. He opened my eyes to possibilities that extended beyond the classroom. To quote the late American writer William Arthur Ward, *“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”* Professor Dlabay is a superior teacher.

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