**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: ***John A. Pope***

Ward: ***10th***

Occupation: ***10th Ward Alderman***

Education: ***Mount Carmel High School, Wabash College***

Previous political and civic experience:

***I have served Chicago’s 10th Ward as Alderman since 1999. Before being elected Alderman I served as an analyst in the City of Chicago’s Office of Budget and Management, as the Director of Demolition for the City’s Building Department, as the City’s Director of Conservation (Building Inspections), then as an Assistant to Mayor Daley. I currently serve as the Vice Chairman for the City Council Committee on Transportation and am a board member of the Chicago Infrastructure Trust (CIT). I am a member of the Cook County Democratic Party and have served as the 10th Ward Democratic Committeeman since 2000.***

***My office focuses on people in our neighborhoods who need help the most, our veterans, seniors and disabled. We regularly work with these groups sponsoring picnics, dinners, resource fairs, money savings programs, the Special Olympics, and other efforts to benefit and recognize these groups.***

***I am also an active and longtime participant in the CAPS (Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy) program which improves the quality of life by creating partnerships between local businesses and residents, Police and City agencies.  I am a member of various community based organizations including the Hegewisch, East Side and South Chicago Chambers of Commerce, Hegewisch Community Committee, East Side Pride, South Chicago Parents, Southeast Environmental Task Force, Calumet Ecological Park Association (CEPA), and the Calumet Area Industrial Commission (CAIC).***

***I attended Mount Carmel High School on the Southside and earned a degree in Economics from Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN.***

**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:

***The dire financial situation the city faces cannot be refuted but we have made progress by passing balanced budgets without raising property or gas taxes, two areas that largely impact working families and retirees who collect a pension. However, we need to address this problem head on by working with the respective parties to find an agreement moving forward.***

***First, the city needs to identify new revenue streams and cut waste and redundancies to make funding available for our city’s workers’ pensions.***

***One specific example is the proposed Chicago casino. A downtown casino could generate some $200 million annually for Chicago alone.***

***I also see more cooperative procurement opportunities among governmental entities such as the City of Chicago, the Park District, CTA and Cook County for similar needed goods and services. If government entities can enter additional agreements together, they will have purchasing power to drive down costs and get the best deal for our tax dollars.***

***Second, every option should be open for discussion when it comes to providing vital city services and protecting our retirees’ pension plans. That includes starting conversations about reforming the TIF program, broadening the city’s sales tax base and closing corporate loopholes at the state level.***

***Lastly, while new revenue streams and tightening the City’s fiscal belt are necessary, they will not solve this problem alone. Both the workers and management must come to the table to find a reasonable compromise to the pension program moving forward.***

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?

***The default to generating new revenue cannot be to increase taxes. Working families are already burdened by high property taxes. Asking them to contribute even more would be an irresponsible place to start a conversation when addressing the City’s financial problems. There are other options to explore like a downtown casino, identifying and cutting government waste, reforming the City’s TIF program and developing cooperative procurement opportunities. The City needs to start the conversation with finding new revenue streams – not increasing existing ones.***

**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?

***In addition to the proposals suggested above, I think reassessing the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program is necessary. Currently, excess TIF funds are used to help balance the City’s operational budget. We need to break the dependency on the TIF surplus to serve as a structural component of the City’s budget so that money can be returned to the respective taxing bodies. This will add a cash injection to a program that desperately needs it.***

***Also, we need to address the recent findings that financial institutions misrepresented risks associated with costly interest rate swaps, costing or causing the City and Chicago Public Schools to pay more than $100 million each year to those financial institutions. I strongly support legal action being taken in this instance to return money back to our schools and to the taxpayer.***

**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: ***Yes***

***This has been a long talked about option for new revenue but has not been seriously explored. I would ask for a fiscal analysis of such a proposal and support a sales tax base expansion that generates new revenue while not endangering local businesses that would be included under such an expansion. I would also be interested to see if such an expansion would allow the City to decrease its sales tax and still have the ability to generate additional revenue. If that is possible, it would alleviate the burden for working families who are spending more on a gallon of milk because of the country’s highest sales tax.***

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

Yes or No: ***Yes***

***Chicago is the economic engine of the Midwest employing thousands of people, many of whom live outside the City. As a result, thousands of non-Chicago residents commute to their Chicago-based jobs, enjoy the benefits of our City, and leave. Many feel offended as if the city is being “used” and a small tax could generate new income for the City.***

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

Yes or No: ***Yes***

***Chicago is home to significant financial institutions including the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) and Chicago Board Options Exchange (CBOE). These institutions conduct countless transactions every year on which a small tax could provide significant monies for local governments. A “small” tax would be necessary to generate much needed dollars while at the same time keeping these institutions in Chicago. Of course, existing laws prohibiting such action would need to be addressed.***

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:

***Police have done an admirable job throughout the City and in the 10th Ward. Many of the officers who live in the ward choose to work here. That demonstrates their personal commitment to our neighborhoods and effectively reducing crime in our Ward. The historical data supports this.***

***Still, Chicagoans need a well-staffed and well trained police department and I will support additional funding to put more police on the streets.***

***Over the past two years we have been reminded that being effective in rooting out crime is not just about quantity but quality. By offering overtime to Chicago police officers, we are able to put experienced and qualified police officers on the streets. Allocating resources where needed, including getting officers out from behind desks and on the street and placing them in higher crime areas, is of great importance. Ensuring our officers are properly prepared for the ongoing and different challenges on the street requires regular training.***

***The ability to obtain and utilize quality data is invaluable in identifying and predicting crime. CompStat and regular meetings should continue as they are a proven method of aiding police in reducing crime. The continued pursuit of various grant monies and formal and informal partnerships with other law enforcement agencies will allow for CPD to more efficiently address problems.***

***The need for my ward office and our police to work closely together is essential for the ward’s success in combating crime. One specific example is my office’s active involvement in the CAPS program. This program fosters community involvement which is so valuable in assisting our Police and ultimately our communities. I have been an active participant in CAPS, and as the local elected official, have made these meetings more successful by providing the police and public with additional city information and services necessary to comprehensively address community issues.***

***There is not one solution to reducing crime. It must be a proactive, comprehensive approach that incorporates a variety of tools and programs. That is why in addition to intense involvement with CAPS, I have sponsored and support block clubs, block club training programs, phone trees, anti-violence marches, anti-graffiti mural efforts, jobs for youths, the local schools, YMCA, park programs, our anti-bullying program, and the chambers. Common sense gun laws are also critical in our efforts. Working together we can reach more people and attack the problem holistically.***

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

***Illinois does not require firearm owners to register their firearms but requires people to register their vehicles. It is strangely odd that such a registration does not exist. Such common sense legislation would help protect the general public, including responsible gun owners, and help address Chicago’s problem with the excessive number of guns on the street. Chicago Police could benefit from such a registry in checking the chain of possession for guns, especially those used in crimes. Such legislation could also include requirements to have gun owners contact law enforcement should their guns be lost or stolen.***

***During my time as alderman I have supported common sense City legislation regarding the assault weapon ban, responsible sale of firearms, and safety zones and will continue to do so.***

**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:

***With input from neighborhood teachers, parents and LSCs, I recognize that taxpayers need a larger voice in how our city’s public education system is operated and how our classrooms are administered. The only way to do so is by giving voice to our neighborhoods that would be represented by an elected School Board.***

**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, as necessary.***

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

***Some ward offices have existing community advisory boards to review TIF projects. I too have advisory boards to gather input and advice on how to spend TIF monies but also to serve as a sounding board for other business proposals. I would like to see a non-partisan board of non-governmental workers at a citywide level who review all TIF proposals regardless of TIF district. That board would be responsible for publishing a public fiscal analysis before the TIF project is voted on in City Council. This will add transparency to a program of which the public is already weary.***

***The 10th Ward contains many “blighted areas” that are being revitalized as we see in the Lakeside project. This funding source is helpful tool to provide the resources necessary to improve the ward.***

***However, TIF dollars cannot be spent irresponsibly. TIF’s intent is to encourage job creation and economic development in “blighted areas.” We need a transparent process to ensure that is how funding is utilized.***

***The City also needs to use excess funds responsibly. Currently, excess TIF funding is used to help balance the City’s operational budget. We need to break the dependency of the TIF surplus serving as a structural component of the City’s budget so that money can be returned to the respective taxing bodies.***

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

***The first step to attracting employers to the 10th Ward is to know what opportunities exist and what needs exist. We have to be able to pair the two. Our large amount of affordable land is a key benefit. Additionally, we have a well trained workforce, are close to major interstates, and have ample transportation infrastructure including rail and water.***

***Working with local organizations including the chambers of commerce, development commissions, realtors, and City agencies allows for a comprehensive approach. The ability to attract more employers is extremely competitive throughout Chicago and especially in the 10th Ward with the neighboring suburbs and Indiana. However, in addition to what has already been stated, I regularly promote the various programs that can incentivize businesses to locate and/or expand here including TIFs, Enterprise Zones, Special Service Areas, programs with the State of Illinois, and our local utility companies. Business is about dollars and cents and one must provide an attractive overall financial package to successfully attract more businesses.***

***After the economic crisis, the 10th Ward was hit hard by unemployment. My office held regular application intakes to allow for local hiring when local businesses opened their doors or expanded their operations. When Ford Motor Company was preparing to expand operations at their assembly plant in the 10th Ward, my office conducted a job fair and application intake to ensure that workers from the ward were included in hiring process. We have worked with other large companies such as Asphalt Operating Services (AOS), Walgreens and Pete’s Fresh Market to not only identify property in the ward for them to open their doors, but to hire workers from the ward. As we prepare for the construction of a new Mariano’s grocery store, the first development on the former US Steel site (Lakeside), my office will once again work with management and constituents to hire locally including a job fair to be held in the neighborhood.***

***While we generally have a well-trained workforce, there are many who are not – especially with the emerging economy and the technological skills required of prospective employees to meet the market’s demand. In order to get the workforce prepared for the jobs we create, my office helps constituents with basic issues including securing a GED, obtaining a driver’s license, and addressing drug/alcohol issues. We have conducted numerous job fairs and worked to get prospective employees into apprenticeship programs. We have also promoted enhancing ones skills by attending the City Colleges or the Steelworker for the Future Program at Prairie State College.***

***The 10th Ward has experienced difficult economic times but we have had a lot of progress and we see much more in the future.***

**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 am open to legislation that would reduce the number of aldermen in City Council. I am concerned that a reduction of aldermen would lead to a reduction in the ability of constituents to be properly represented including the provision of basic city services. Any legislation would have to alleviate that concern before I would support it. The public, including residents and business, rely heavily on their alderman. Aldermen serve as a local point of contact for vital city services and are a resource for other constituent needs like employment opportunities or to help a new business open their doors. Ask most constituents who their state or federal legislators are and you are very likely to get a wrong answer whereas many know who their alderman is because they rely on them.***

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: ***Yes***

Please explain:

***A downtown casino could generate some $200 million annually for Chicago. While I understand the concerns with gambling in Chicago, other Illinois municipalities and states have gambling, have generated millions in additional revenue, and have not experienced the problems often associated with gambling.***

***As the 10th Ward is adjacent to the state of Indiana and the Hammond, Indiana casino, I have seen first-hand the benefits a casino can provide. The revenues, employment, and ancillary economic impact are quite evident and significant.***

**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: ***Yes***

Please explain:

***I do support these programs for safety-related purposes. I view it as an extension of other traffic safety laws and ordinances such as the hands-free laws recently passed by the State to make our roads safer for pedestrians and other drivers. The traffic cameras will make it safer not just for motorists but for the City’s growing population of bicyclists, children who walk to school, and other pedestrian foot traffic. Prior to the introduction of the camera program my office had been addressing speeding, and other potentially dangerous traffic conditions. As a result, we have and continue to be active in incorporating traffic calming measures including speed humps, stops signs, one way signs, speed limit signs, radar missions (enforcement-ticketing), and pavement markings. While the camera program has a revenue benefit, the objective is to prevent accidents and save lives on which no dollar value can be placed. In light of the recent newspaper articles regarding the program, I believe careful and ongoing review is necessary. An independent entity should be hired to objectively examine the program and make recommended improvements.***

***In the 10th Ward we have no red light cameras and three speed cameras. One of the speed cameras was installed as a result of citizen requests to my office and a history of accidents and property damage. The others are located on the heavily traveled US 41 which is a major local carrier of commuter traffic to and from downtown. These cameras are located near parks, schools, churches, and daycare centers. The cameras appear to be working as there is a very obvious reduction in motorists’ speed.***

**11) Ward issues**

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

1. ***Economic development***

***The 10th Ward is historically an industrial ward. With the loss of industrial jobs nationally, our ward has been faced with tough economic challenges. The recent housing and financial collapses added to the ward’s difficulties. However, we have been extremely successful getting workers back with recent accomplishments such as adding new shifts at the Chicago Ford Assembly Plant which now runs three shifts and employs nearly 4,000 people.***

***Also stemming from the 10th Ward’s long history of industry, we are forced to tackle environmental concerns left behind by businesses that have long shuttered their doors. A long-term project I am proud to have played a role in is the Lakeside project located on the former site of the US Steel/South Works property. Millions of dollars have already been spent on the redevelopment efforts. In the short-term, we are proud that Mariano’s Fresh Market was one of the first businesses committed to develop on the property that will employ local residents and help address the ward’s unemployment issues.***

***The 10th Ward also contains large tracts of land including brownfields and landfills. That is why my office has worked with the State of Illinois and community to initiate projects like the Mud to Parks Program. The innovative Mud to Parks Program takes river mud containing sediment that is choking rivers in Central Illinois and reusing it in Chicago to create public parks on contaminated land. This is a transformative process where mud serves as topsoil for new Chicago lakefront parks including the former US Steel South Works property – property where nothing would grow after years of industry. By adding layers of topsoil, we have been able to grow trees and grass while relieving Central Illinois’ rivers and putting workers back on the job.***

***Not only are we putting Chicagoans back to work, we are revitalizing the ward to make additional opportunities available for economic development. We have already witnessed those opportunities bearing fruit. Since the financial crisis, I have worked with our local chambers of commerce and employers to open businesses in the ward. We have seen the recent additions of the Chicago Family Health Center, Pete’s Fresh Market, O’Reilly’s Auto Store, Planet Fitness, Subway Restaurants, T-Mobile, and Pizza Hut.***

***Working with local organizations including the chambers of commerce, development commissions, realtors, and City agencies allows for a comprehensive approach. Economic development (increasing the number of employers, employees, tax and sales revenue, etc.) is extremely competitive throughout Chicago and especially in the 10th Ward with the neighboring suburbs and Indiana. However, in addition to what has already been stated, I regularly promote the various programs that can incentivize businesses to locate and/or expand here including TIFs, Enterprise Zones, Special Service Areas (SSAs), programs with the State of Illinois, and our local utility companies. Business is about dollars and cents and one must provide an attractive overall financial package to successfully attract more businesses.***

1. ***Reducing crime***

***While the 10th Ward does not experience the high levels of crime that other Southside wards encounter, I spend a lot of time working with the 4th Police District and community organizations to keep crime from spreading into our ward and to reduce existing crime. In addition to working with our neighbors through CAPS and other neighborhood organizations as described above, our office recently worked with the CPD and the community to launch the Residential Area In Need (RAIN) program. RAIN was developed to help provide additional, focused, unique police services to the South Chicago neighborhood. This program uses specially trained officers to work closely with community policing officers, tactical units, beat officers and community partners within the district.  The RAIN team officers work with crime analysis, residents and their concerns, and community partners to determine a focused course of action including problem buildings and problem businesses.***

***Again, there is not one solution to reducing crime. It must be a proactive, comprehensive approach that incorporates a variety of tools and programs. Working together we can reach more people and attack the problem holistically.***

1. ***Improving education***

***The 10th Ward has endured overcrowding in our classrooms for long enough. That’s why I worked with Chicago Public Schools and community organizations to open a new elementary school in the ward. Construction on the $42 million new elementary school begins this spring and will alleviate overcrowded classrooms at Jane Addams and Gallistel Elementary schools – allowing for students to get the attention in the classroom they need. This is the third new school during my tenure as alderman.***

***There have been other positive and encouraging developments in the 10th Ward regarding our City’s public education system. Henry Clay Elementary went from a Level 3 rated school to a Level 1+ rating which was released in a report by Chicago Public Schools in early December. Furthermore, Washington High School increased its graduation rate from 69% to 79%. While our education system still needs a lot of work, we are without question seeing significant improvements. I anticipate that the longer school day and school year, which I have and will continue to support, will have further impact on the success of our children’s ability to learn.***

***The after-school and summer programs are also vital to our children’s educational needs and, equally as important, to their safety. Many Chicago neighborhoods are faced with levels of crime that no child should encounter. That is why I worked with the community to open the South Chicago Arts Center. The new center will provide kids a safe, fun, and creative alternative to the streets. The City’s summer employment program will allow thousands of local youth to gain valuable employment during the summer months. This provides our youth with the opportunity to make money, gain valuable work experience, keep them off the streets and away from less desirable places and activities. It also exposes them to people, places, and cultures that they might not otherwise experience in their respective neighborhood. I will continue these programs and fight for proper funding so that all of Chicago’s children have a safe alternative after school and during the summer to continue their education and keep them off the streets in a productive environment.***