

2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: James Cappleman

Ward: 46

Occupation: Alderman

Education: I have a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Houston and an MSW from UIC's Jane Addams School of Social Work.

Previous political and civic experience:

Currently, I am the 46th Ward Alderman, 46th Ward Democratic Committeeman, and board member of Annie's Legacy (an organization that provides mentoring to women who've experienced domestic violence).

- Past board president of Dignity Chicago (A Roman Catholic organization that advocates for reform for LGBT issues and women's ordination within the Catholic Church).
- Past board president of Uptown Chicago Commission, an organization that seeks to improve the quality of life for all Uptown residents
- Past chair of the HIV/AIDS Network for the IL Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers
- Co-founder of the former St. Catherine of Genoa Catholic Worker House (a shelter for people living with HIV/AIDS)
- I have received numerous awards for advocacy work, including for people experiencing HIV/AIDS, homelessness, and domestic violence.

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, but not at the risk of reducing benefits for employees who are 20 years or less from retirement.

Please Explain:

When I attended a 3-week course at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, I learned that for the first time in our country's history, government employees have both higher wages and better benefits than the private sector. Traditionally, government wages have always been lower and benefits higher. This situation is causing many cities across the country to privatize many of their services in order to keep costs down.

The end goal should be to switch over to FICA so that new employees can later qualify for Social Security retirement along with a 401 K program. This would start to place the private sector on a similar footing with the government worker, thus reduce the need to privatize many of the city's services.

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?

When taxes are raised, it's important to more fully understand the negative repercussions of this move, i.e. the effect on attracting businesses into the City and keeping the middle and higher income wage earner because of our dependency on their tax revenue. That requires the analysis of an econometrician to provide aldermen with the needed information so that a sound judgement call can be made. That's why I have fully backed the need for the Committee on Fiscal Analysis to help provide aldermen with objective information so that they can make a more informed decision about various scenarios, including ones that require the raising of tax revenue.

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?

City aldermen have as much access to the finances of CPS as the general public and the press. I believe it would be to the benefit of the CPS Board to establish a Committee on Fiscal Analysis to better enable them to have the necessary information so that they can make this decision in an informed manner. As of now, I don't have the needed information to enable me to give an informed answer. Like city employees, I would hope that they also later choose to slowly transition from a pension to paying FICA so that they can qualify for Social Security at a later point, along with a 401 k, as the private sector does.

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](#)

* 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.

When I make any decision, I focus on 3 factors:

- Is it fair?
- Do the benefits outweigh the negative repercussions?
- Is it founded in the use of evidence-based, best practices?

My answers to the above questions are based on what I believe would be fair, but in all honesty, I need more information about possible negative repercussions and the use of evidenced-based, best practices for all 3 of these areas. That's why I am strongly supportive of the formation of the Committee on Fiscal Analysis (COFA) that would gather the necessary information so that aldermen could feel more comfortable with making a more informed decision.

4) Crime

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

Yes or No: [No](#)

Please explain:

Three reasons:

- Across the country, cities on average pay between 30% to 70% of their entire city budget on public safety. The City of Chicago pays around 66%, which is on the very high end.
- We have more police per capita than the largest 5 cities in the country.
- When I reviewed crime trends, I counted up all the violent, quality of life, and property crime in Lakeview and Uptown going back 5 years. In all of these areas, crime has dropped in both community areas. In Uptown, violent crime has dropped over 40% since I've been in office, and within some of the criminal hot spots, crime has dropped even more, i.e., over 80% at the corner of Lawrence/Sheridan.

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

I would focus on 3 things:

- Get Illinois to pass a law to ban the sale of assault weapons. There's no need for civilians to own an assault weapon.
- Have legislation passed that would require firearm owners to safely store their ammunition.
- Require private firearm sellers to do a background check before they sell someone a firearm.

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: **No**

Please explain:

I have spoken with state legislators who are charged with making this decision, and see strong pros and cons to both appointed and elected school boards. A hybrid model could work, however, I do have some concerns. For one, I am concerned about allowing an election to take place for school board when we've seen wealthy individuals basically buy a seat in communities around the country to influence how the schools are run. Second, as a gay man, I'm concerned about allowing outside, big money influences play a role in the school curriculum. Every year we watch Texas move further away from Science and closer to religious studies and the last thing we need is a place that is no longer safe for our LGBT youth.

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**

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

There continues to be much confusion about TIFs. They generally do better in areas where there is promise of some growing economic viability. My issue with them is that what gets built is not always what qualified the area to be a TIF. I'd like to see the only improvements that get done are the items that qualified the area to be a TIF in the first place. I would also like to see more effort to close a TIF after what qualified the area for a TIF gets completed.

7) Neighborhood economic development

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

I created a Ward Master Plan that businesses and developers use frequently to make decisions about coming into the ward and I spend at least 8 hours per week specifically focused on attracting more development into the ward. The 46th Ward is within the top 10% of wards with the highest number of building permits. When Sonic executives viewed the Ward Master Plan and read that close to 50% of the area residents don't own cars, they designed their first ever urban-designed Sonic. Additionally, I have worked with all new businesses on using our local job training programs to find local, qualified employees. I also worked with the area businesses to get them to become more proactive about addressing crime. I worked with the police district to educate them on calling 911 and we tracked their call rates. They were also asked to clear out their windows so that people could see in and out, which greatly helped with reducing drug trafficking. As a result, store sales in former hot spots of crime went up over 20%. My ward website also lists all the different programs that assist with job training/placement opportunities. I go for walks in the ward and frequently take residents over to these programs.

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 support reducing the number of aldermen from 50 to 20 if two things occurred:

- A clear and reasonable timeframe should be provided to residents about a response to a 311 request. This is contingent on changing the norm that one must go through their alderman to get a better response to a 311 request. We would also need to require various departments to provide a time frame when they can expect a city service to be completed.
- I continue to believe that aldermen are “zoning czars” and a more objective system needs to be created for zoning requests. The current system opens the door more easily for pay-to-play politics.

9) A Chicago casino

Do you support, in general concept, establishing a gambling casino in Chicago?
Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

I once was highly opposed to gambling casinos in Chicago but the reality is that people leave Chicago to gamble. We might as well as capture this revenue. Also, I have witnessed many people spending large sums of money on lottery tickets, which is just another form of gambling. The way I see it now, if people really want to gamble, nothing is going to stop them.

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 voted “No” on the speed cameras because I was not convinced the purpose of them was to reduce injuries of school age children. I asked the Mayor’s Office to provide me a listing of child injuries during that occurred from 7am to 7pm and I was told that this information was not available. With no evidence that this was an issue and with my own personal observation that speeding was almost rarely an issue, I felt obligated to vote no. Around the schools in the 46th Ward, the issue appears to be more related to traffic jams rather than speeding cars.
- I’m also not convinced that the red light cameras prevent accidents and injuries. I would need more evidence before I could support red light cameras.

11) Ward issues

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

These are the issues that residents bring up at most gatherings:

1. Economic development/job creation (The Wilson L rehab, the Entertainment District, the Uptown Theatre, reuse of Stewart School, and the Clarendon/Montrose TIF)
2. Housing (affordable, safe, and adequate)
3. Gang activity in and around the parks