**Candidate Name:** Harish I. Patel

**District running for:** State Representative, IL 40th District

**Political party:** Democrat

**Political/civic background:**

Co-founder of Chicago Votes, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing civic engagement among young people that has played a critical role in passing two landmark pieces of voting rights legislation in recent years, despite gridlock in Springfield.

Social Entrepreneur at Accelerate Change, a joint initiative of SEIU Healthcare Illinois/Indiana and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, working to support community organizations that advocate for policies to improve the lives of immigrants, new residents and their neighbors.

**Occupation:** Owner, *ishi ves*t and community organizer

**Education:** Bachelor of Arts, Political Science & Philosophy, UIC

Master in Urban Planning & Policy, UIC

**Campaign website:** www.harishipatel.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.***

**We face an urgent and deep revenue crisis, and are paying a heavy price today in the reduction of state revenues and consequently of state services to our most needy residents, due to Gov. Rauner’s decision to expire the temporary 5 percent income tax increase implemented under Gov. Quinn.**

**Ultimately, I believe in replacing this tax hike with a graduated, progressive income tax structure, which is why I support The Fair Tax legislation introduced by Senator Don Harmon. At present, the wealthiest Illinoisans pay a much smaller portion of their income in taxes than working families do. A progressive structure would ease the burden on the vast majority of Illinois’ families, while generating billions in new revenue annually. What is imperative at this juncture is developing progressive taxes that do not disproportionately affect working families.**

**In the near term, we must be thorough and rigorous in enforcing corporate taxation and closing of corporate tax loopholes, which are pervasive in our state and are costing us a huge amount of potential revenue. We must limit tax exemptions for large corporations which exert heavier use of our infrastructure and our natural resources. Before we ask any individuals at any income level to pay more, we must see to it that corporations doing business in Illinois are fulfilling their tax obligations to our state.**

**I am in favor, as well, of creating a transaction tax on LaSalle Street trading and hedge funds, as economic research has demonstrated that even a 3-cent transaction tax would reap enormous and immediate benefit without causing any damage to markets.**

**I would also favor a small but necessary expansion of state sales tax to include luxury personal services.**

**But above all, we need to tackle the essential reform of our state tax system. A progressive income tax in which those who can afford to pay at a higher rate are taxed at a higher rate is a rational system.**

*If you oppose all tax hikes, please provide specifics on how you would reduce state spending by $7 billion to balance the state budget.*

1. **I am not opposed to all tax hikes. I am opposed to unfair, burdensome tax hikes on working and low-income households. What is imperative at this juncture is developing progressive taxes that do not disproportionately affect working families.**

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?*

1. **The Illinois Constitution and the courts have been very clear with us and, as such, we should keep the promises made to our retirees. If we want to attract top-notch public servants and teachers, we have to honor our commitments and make this a desirable state in which to work, not a state that takes its employees’ money and decides to reduce their agreed-upon benefits.**

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?*

1. **I heartily support this notion in principle. It is critical that we find a path forward, and a bipartisan initiative could offer a way out of the present deadlock and intransigence. However, one can’t endorse a proposal *a priori* without knowing what is in it. My support for this type of a budget template will depend upon what it contains and how open the process is, so that all members can contribute to the plan.**

**Education:**

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

1. **We must focus on funding schools at both adequate and equitable levels. It is deplorable that Illinois is ranked last in the nation in the State Contribution to P-12 funding of schools. This has to change if Illinois is to progress economically.**
2. **Public education is an investment in the future economic growth of this state. We must break the stranglehold the Republicans have placed on education funding. In general, that means moving away from reliance on property taxes and towards a progressive state income tax as a way of funding schools.**
3. **Revamping the state tax structure is vital to saving and renewing public education in Illinois. This can be accomplished by collecting the taxes we are due from corporations, financial traders, and the most wealthy individuals, while at the same time protecting the pension funds with which the State is entrusted.**

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?*

1. **It does not make sense that Chicago is paying twice for pension costs. Chicago teachers' pensions were in part negotiated benefits in lieu of salary. Increases in pension payments must be accompanied by corresponding salary increases.**
2. **The residents of Chicago are in essence double-taxed for pension costs. Both the state and city need to end pension holiday and put the pension funds back on a firm footing.**

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?*

1. **I believe in funding our schools adequately and equitably. As for higher education, I myself am a graduate of the U of I system and benefited from grants and aid as both an undergrad and a graduate student. Without this assistance, it is difficult to imagine how I could have managed to earn an advanced degree as a recent immigrant of limited financial means.**
2. **If we are serious about Illinois being a leader in technology, manufacturing and culture, we must invest in public higher education, while focusing on reducing waste and administrative costs that do not directly add value to education. We as a State need to make sure that we are taking advantage of the federal program to make community colleges free and move towards affordable and widely accessible public higher education.**

**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?*

1. **Illinois needs to work consistently toward obtaining federal funding for our infrastructure needs. The transportation bill that recently passed in Congress should be the first step before adding more taxes and fees on the citizens of our state.**

Q) *Illinois’ public transportation formula provides money for operating costs, but not capital costs. Should Illinois create a reliable funding stream for capital costs?*

**Yes. As we have seen, without a reliable funding stream, it is difficult to create the political will to properly finance these projects to date.**

**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.*

**We know that nationally, service-based jobs are on the rise and manufacturing is declining, both because of automation and the globalization of the market force. We need to stay focused on creating more stability in our government, and to finally pass a comprehensive budget so we can attract more businesses and stabilize the struggling middle class. A few steps that our state can take to increase manufacturing are:**

1. **Promote and support green manufacturing that creates a pipeline for vocational training programs towards high paying green manufacturing jobs.**
2. **Invest in the clean energy sector, including solar, wind and water energy that will also help our state reduce carbon emissions.**
3. **Create a tax credit specifically targeting small- and mid-level businesses to connect the service-based and technology-oriented business to manufacturing businesses so that we can create a rising tide of industries that are interconnected and interdependent on each other.**

**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?*

1. **I oppose the legislation backed by Exelon.**

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?*

1. **I support the Illinois Clean Jobs Bill because it will benefit the consumer and our environment while creating jobs and economic development for our state.**

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?*

1. **Carbon taxes are a more effective means of decreasing pollution while also generating revenue to invest in clean energy resources such as wind and water energy production.**

**Gun safety:**

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

1. **Yes, I strongly support and will champion both measures. I have called for stronger gun laws that require comprehensive background checks on gun purchasers and that more harshly punish illegal gun sellers who bring dangerous weapons into our communities.**

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

1. **I support state licensing for all firearms dealer.**

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

1. **I support such measures. Family members, parents, domestic partners are often in the best position to know when an individual is in crisis, behaving violently or irrationally, or otherwise likely to harm himself or others. A uniform and rapid process for engaging law enforcement and getting help for the individual are essential to preventing tragic events.**

**Criminal justice:**

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

1. **I support measures which promote transparency and which preserve police disciplinary records, while being mindful of the rights of police officers to privacy and confidentiality as employees. The preservation of records is crucial in ensuring that citizens are able to revisit and gain due process over time, as many wrongful conviction cases in Illinois have demonstrated. These records can also inform our understanding of patterns and trends in law enforcement that can prove useful in our pursuit of reform and public safety.**

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?*

1. **Although prison populations have fallen in recent years, they are still unacceptably overcrowded. Given that the Illinois prison system is equipped for 32,000 persons, a 25% reduction from recent numbers would still not fully address overcrowding. Investing in prisons has proven financially and socially destructive time and again.**

**I will focus on restorative justice measures such as investment in programming and education with the goal of reducing prison populations overall. Investing in rehabilitation and reentry initiatives is essential to not only thinning prison populations, but also keeping the numbers down.**

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?*

1. **No.**

Q) *Given that there are more empty beds than youth now in the juvenile prisons, do you support closing one or more juvenile prisons?*

1. **As a strong advocate for reform of the juvenile justice system, I would support such measures. Continued efforts towards keeping youth out of detention centers advances the education and success of Illinois’ youth, and provide more financial resources for investment in youth development programming, education and job training.**

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?*

1. **The sex offender registry ensures that communities have access to information about potential surrounding dangers. However, we must consider reforms to ensure the registries for both adults and juveniles are both effective in protecting communities and do not prevent offenders from rehabilitation.**

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

1. **A form of merit selection for judges is necessary as the amount of money and special interest that influence the process threatens the independence of the important job of the judiciary. The justice system requires judges that are qualified and impartial. Any merit selection process would still require oversight to provide checks and balances that will neither give complete control to a committee nor the governor, but will include the legislative arm as well.**

**Other:**

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

**A) I broadly support in principle the need to reform the manner in which legislative districts are drawn. We need a process which protects and empowers the most underrepresented constituencies in our state as well as accurately reflecting the changing demographics of Illinois.**

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

1. **I will support legislation that will lower workers’ compensation costs for Illinois employers by injecting more competition into the workers comp insurance marketplace through the creation of a state operated fund. I will strive to develop and further policy that best meets the needs of our workers and their families.**

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

1. **I support automatic voter registration enthusiastically, and am proud that the non-profit organization which I helped to create, Chicago Votes, is currently one of the leading groups fighting to get this done. I am committed to constantly thinking of ways to make democracy more accessible, and to encourage the active, engaged participation of voters, including newly eligible voters.**

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

1. **Illinois needs to institute public financing for elections in local municipalities to expand democracy and limit the influence of big money and corporate interests in political campaigns.**

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?*

1. **After arriving in the United States from India at the age of 14, I moved around a lot, starting in the Northwest Side of Chicago, where I attended Taft High School, to Naperville Central High School, and ending up in Skokie at Niles North High School. My favorite teacher was an English Language Learning (ELL) specialist at Niles North High School. I appreciated her for understanding all the cultural nuances that go with being a newly arrived student. In addition to being a teacher, she served as social worker, counselor and speech therapist for me. She played a huge role in cultivating my love for reading books that has stayed with me ever since.**