**Name:** Genita C. Robinson

**District running for:** 6th Representative District

**Political party:** Democratic

**Political/civic background:**

Political:

* Aldermanic Candidate, 2nd Ward, City of Chicago (2010 – 2011) (in a field of six, received 31% percent of the vote and the endorsement of two major newspapers)
* Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky’s Ultimate Women’s Power Lunch, Co-Chair (2009)
* Personal PAC – Luncheon Host Committee and Volunteer (2008-2009)
* Obama for America, Illinois Finance Committee Member (2007 – 2008)

Civic:

* Illinois Women’s Institute for Leadership, Board Member (2015 – present) (trains women to run for political office)
* Edgar Fellow (2012) (bipartisan leadership development program)
* Cook County Justice for Children/Jane Addams Juvenile Court Foundation, Board Member (2008 – present) (advocates for best practices at the Cook County Juvenile Court and the Cook County Temporary Detention Center)
* Leadership Greater Chicago, Fellow (2001 – present) and Leadership Fellows Association, Vice President (2009 – 2014)
* South Loop Neighbors, Founding Member and former Board Member (1998 – present)
* Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Board Member (2010 – 2014) (working to create a safer America through the reduction of gun deaths and injuries)
* Serve Illinois – Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Member (2009 – 2012)

**Occupation:**

For seven years, I was the Executive Director of Lawyers Lend-A-Hand to Youth, an organization which provides cash and in-kind support (volunteers and training) to one-on-one mentoring programs for children. I left in August of 2015 with the plan to take some time off. I am now devoted full-time to the campaign.

In addition to my nonprofit experience, I have worked in government at the Chicago Public Schools and in the private practice of law at Sachnoff & Weaver Ltd. (now Reed Smith LLP).

**Education:**

* The University of Chicago Law School: Doctor of Law
  + Mandel Legal Aid Clinic: Juvenile Justice Law Clerk
* Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service: Bachelor of Science (International Politics)

**Campaign website:** [www.genitarobinson.org](http://www.genitarobinson.org)

**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.*

*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) Given our debt and structural deficit, Illinois must explore all reasonable revenue increases to meet our existing obligations and plan for the state’s future. My priority is the elimination of our constitutional prohibition against a progressive income tax as our current flat tax structure is regressive. I do not support a tax on retirement income.

Any fiscal reform must be part of a comprehensive balanced budget and thoughtful in that income tax rates (personal and corporate), tax bases (consumables v. services), property taxes, and revenue allocation (including Local Government Distributive Fund) must be considered in concert.

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?*

A) Given the rather clear and unequivocal decision of the Illinois Supreme Court and the fact that the state has been derelict in not paying its share of pension contributions, the best options with which to start are to figure out a dedicated revenue stream to meet past obligations and perhaps change the timeline (amortization schedule).

Going forward, I do support a process that brings all stakeholders together to develop a legal, reasonable, and responsible plan for the future in the context of a balanced budget

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) Given the substantial delay in passing the FY16 budget and the resulting harm to Illinois’ most vulnerable citizens, I support any process efforts to determine where there is agreement amongst legislators.

**Education:**

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

A) To start, we have to change the level at which the state funds schools and the formula that we use. The state is constitutionally mandated to be the primary funder of education, but as it is not meeting its obligation, we are overly reliant upon local property taxes. In addition, our funding formula is overly complex. I support efforts by Senator Andy Manar to simplify the formula and ensure that our neediest districts get the resources that they require.

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?*

A) The current system is not fair to Chicagoans. I strongly support moving to an equitable pension funding system. I worry about whether the latter, shifting the costs to all local schools districts, would results in higher property taxes as our school funding system is already overly reliant on property taxes. I do appreciate that the shift to local districts would discourage rogue districts from gaming the system by awarding large pre-retirement pay increases to superintendents and other senior level administrators that participate in the Illinois Teachers Retirement System.

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) The status quo is not sustainable as vital to Illinois’ future prosperity is a quality K-20 public education system. Strong oversight through quality leadership and governance is necessary to ensure the efficient use of funds in higher education, but a properly run system is a key generator of jobs and even revenue through research grants and resulting innovation.

**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) Investment in infrastructure is a priority for me to maintain safety and promote growth by leveraging private sector investment and creating jobs. The Metropolitan Planning Council estimates that 75,000 new jobs could be created through infrastructure investment. The gas tax is a logical resource, and those tax rates have not kept up with the price of construction.

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) Yes. We must invest in public transportation improvements as such investments spur private sector development and cut down on ongoing repair/maintenance costs, ensuring the safety of our citizens.

**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) First, we must fix our fiscal crisis by developing a plan to pay our past debts and meet future obligations going forward in the context of a balanced budget. This is key to attracting any type of new business. Second, we should ensure that we do not unnecessarily create barriers to entry with regulation. Third, the state should show a commitment to help to train people for these jobs. The Chicago Public Schools has made some headway with its Career and Technical Training, but we need more programs statewide that partner with local manufacturers on training and internships for high school students.

**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?*

A) I would like to see an alternative proposal as I am not sure that this is the best use of a subsidy. We need to be expanding our use of clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar energy —sources which never run out and reduce our dependence on foreign energy.

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) I fully support the Illinois Clean Jobs Bill. This legislation will bring our energy efficiency and renewability laws up to date and put us on track to meet the EPA’s carbon pollution standards. This legislation will ultimately lower electricity costs and will generate an estimated 32,000 new jobs per year, many of which could be in my district

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) Yes, I support a carbon tax and using that money towards: 1) reducing energy costs for low-income families; and 2) investing in wind and solar to create jobs.

**Gun safety:**

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

A) Yes, our goal must be universal background checks, and the best way to stem the flow of guns into our communities is to limit the ability of people to make straw purchases and increase penalties.

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

A) I support licensing for all firearms dealers. Beyond licensing, we must ensure that bad-apple gun dealers such as Chuck’s in Riverdale cease to be able to operate as a legal entity supplying guns for illegal activities. From 2009 to 2013, over 1,500 guns recovered in crimes in Chicago originated from Chuck’s.

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

A) I support allowing families to file such petitions. While in Chicago we often see news about people in the midst of criminal activity shooting others, a large portion of gun deaths are suicides, in particular suicides committed by former members of the military.

**Criminal justice:**

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

A) I support increased transparency, while respecting employee privacy rights, and record preservation. We must amend the Illinois Records Act, and we need to insure increased transparency by strengthening our Freedom of Information Act.

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?*

A) Yes. Of the 10,000 detainees in Cook County jail, 70% are nonviolent offenders who cannot afford bail. These numbers suggest that we are criminalizing poverty and addiction. I support current efforts before the General Assembly to treat low-level drug possession cases as ticketable offenses, and I support, based on appropriate risk assessments, early release of aged and disabled prisoners. These reforms are humane and fiscally responsible.

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) There is value in automatic expungement or sealing of arrest records where there were no resulting charges. I support providing more education and awareness about the availability of expungement and sealing generally.

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) My concern with closing entire sites is that the further removed juvenile detainees are from their families the more likely they are to re-offend. We should explore cost-efficient solutions that do not result in larger costs, including the social cost of recidivism, down the road.

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 need to see more of the scientific research on this, in particular data regarding the risks and likelihood of re-offending.

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

A) I am willing to explore alternatives to our current electoral system; however, I have many concerns about how a selection committee would be chosen and held accountable.

**Other:**

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

A) The current process is very opaque. My concern about the pending amendment is protection for communities of concern and whether respect for communities sharing common social and economic interests will result in segregating voters into districts based on socioeconomic status to the voters’ detriment.

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

A) Through an agreed bill process, changes to the workers compensation system were just made in 2011. Those changes have resulted in lower costs, and we should wait to see what further positive results develop before seeking to change the system again.

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

A) I strongly support automatic voter registration. This will make it easier for more citizens to participate in the democratic process and eliminate a registration process that has become increasingly antiquated.

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

A) An ideal system would require complete and almost instantaneous reporting of campaign contributions.

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) My high school history teacher, Mr. MacPherson, was probably the most important teacher in my life. History was always one of my favorite subjects, but he also co-taught a Humanities class that I took my senior year. In this class, we studied art, music, philosophy, and theology. We took field trips to the Art Institute and the symphony and participating in architectural tours. Many schools might have not supported a class such as this because it could be seen as not practical. The class inspired such an intellectual curiosity in me and others, and it exposed me to so much culturally that I otherwise would not have known. I later actually took training to be an architectural tour guide. My love of the field started with Mr. MacPherson.