**Name:** Bill Foster

**District running for:** U.S. Congress – IL-11

**Political/civic background:** None prior to election to U.S. Congress

**Occupation:** High Energy Particle Physicist, Manufacturer and Entrepreneur, U.S. Congressman

**Education:** BA, Physics, Univ. Wisconsin-Madison; Ph.D. Physics, Harvard

**Campaign website:** www.billfoster.com

**Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Board questionnaire responses**

**Legislative priorities:**

Q) *What are your three top national legislative priorities for the country?*

A) My three top legislative priorities are to continue and to extend the policies responsible for the economic recovery, increase funding for long-term priorities like education and scientific research, and improve treatment options for those suffering with opioid and heroin addiction.

Q: *What are the three most important issues in your district on which you believe the federal government needs to act?*

A) The federal government needs to increase the availability of lifesaving treatments to stop an overdose and beat opioid and heroin addiction, to finally deliver the money needed to fix our crumbling infrastructure, and to fix the Payer State problem by which states like Illinois pay far more in federal taxes than they receive back in federal spending.

Q) *What is your biggest fundamental difference with your opponent(s)?*

A) At this point I have three opponents, all of whom seem to be basing their campaigns on the same failed policies we see from Republicans at the top of the ticket. Those principles have failed to produce good results for our economy whenever they have been tried. As a scientist, I rely upon empirical evidence to inform my policy views, and the lessons of the last two decades are clear. Our economy grows best when the middle class is strong, which is why I support investments in infrastructure and education, and tax cuts for the middle class.

The U.S economy created 22 million jobs in the Clinton years, zero net jobs in the Bush years, and more than 12 million jobs since the economic recovery that began under Obama. Business profitability, economic growth, and the net worth of American families show similar results. This is not an accident. I support investments in infrastructure and education and tax cuts for the middle class because they are shown to be much more effective at stimulating growth than the Republican agenda of increased spending on foreign wars and tax cuts for the wealthy that my opponents support.

The economy has improved dramatically in the last seven years. Economic growth has occurred in spite of the Republican agenda that has taken our economy to the brink of default and shutdown the government. Instead of an ideological agenda, we need real ideas to reduce the deficit and begin paying down the debt with balanced, bipartisan solutions.

**Transparency:**

Q) *Will you pledge to make public: a) your campaign schedule; b) your fundraiser schedule and the names of all fundraiser hosts ; c) if elected, your daily schedule of meetings? If not, why not?*

A)

As a representative in the United States Congress, my job is to be the voice of the people of the 11th District. And that is why I am frequently attending events in the community, listening to constituents, and offering them opportunities to share their opinions. Last year I attended over 150 events in the community and had 70 individual meetings with constituents.

My office regularly announces my appearances though press releases, social media, and my website. I invite any constituent who would like to speak with me or my staff to call my office or send me a message at [www.foster.house.gov](http://www.foster.house.gov).

Q) *Please list all relatives on public or campaign payrolls and their jobs on those payrolls.*

A) No relatives are on the public or campaign payrolls.

**National security:**

Q) *What are the most important actions Congress can take to reduce the threat of ISIS abroad and at home?*

A) It is important that Congress pass an explicit Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) to define and support the powers that the President can use to combat ISIS. There is a broad bipartisan consensus that ISIS should be attacked by a U.S. led coalition using U.S. and foreign air power and coalition ground forces with very limited special-forces intervention. This could be done without significant numbers of US ground combat troops, who have already been asked to sacrifice too much. However the current leadership of Congress is refusing to even debate such an authorization, because they prefer to stand back and criticize the President for pursuing policies which do not differ greatly from their own positions.

This lack of a clearly articulated national position through an AUMF makes it much more difficult to assemble the coalition that will be necessary both to defeat ISIS and to govern the former ISIS-held territory once it has been defeated. It is crucial that we combat terrorism without becoming the world’s police.

The threat of homegrown ISIS-inspired attacks is made far worse by the bigoted rhetoric heard from some of our political leaders. We should make it clear that the United States is an inclusive democracy that does not discriminate on the basis of religion and accepts peaceful members of all religions.

Q) *What bans, if any, do you support on Muslim admissions to the United States? Please explain your position.*

A) I do not support any categorical bans predicated on a person’s religion. I did support changes to the Visa Waiver Program that would require people seeking to come to the United States from places like Syria and Iraq to go obtain a visa instead of getting a waiver. This proposal had bipartisan support and was enacted in the omnibus spending bill.

Q) *Specifically, how would you have, or how did you, vote on the American Security Against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act of 2015 and its efforts to make it harder for Syrian and Iraqi refugees to enter the U.S.? Please explain your position.*

A) I voted against H.R. 4038, the American SAFE Act of 2015. Keeping Americans safe is always the first priority, but this was a political bill that did not improve the process by which we provide refuge for those fleeing strife. This bill would have created a set of unworkable standards that could only be met by denying admission to essentially all refugees from these war-torn areas. I hope to have a serious conversation on improvements to our refugee intake system while taking every precaution to ensure our safety, but this bill did not provide that.

Q) *Do you support a Syrian no-fly zone or the U.S. enforcement of Syrian humanitarian safe zones? Why or why not?*

A) The situation in Syria is deeply complex, with a profusion of groups competing for power and accusations of atrocities on all sides. I have supported the President’s initiation of limited military action against the Islamic State, the most well-known, and most brutal, of the groups involved. The Islamic State’s campaign in northern and western Iraq threatens to destabilize much of the region. However, I do not believe that another extended ground war in the Middle East is a wise use of American resources.

The major use of a no-fly zone would be to prevent the Assad regime from attacking civilian targets from the air. We need to have a robust debate in the Congress over a new authorization of military force (AUMF) to spell out the actions the President can take to protect our interests and prevent the perpetration of war crimes. I was appalled at the use of chemical weapons by the regime of Bashar al Assad against the Syrian civilian population during the summer of 2013 and publicly went on record in favor of an AUMF at that time. The use of chemical weapons against civilians violates all accepted rules of war. Countering the spread of these weapons must be a top priority of U.S. foreign policy.

More recently, there have been reports of the use of chlorine gas in Syria. Because chlorine is an industrial chemical with legitimate manufacturing uses, it is not banned by the CWC in the same manner that sarin gas is. Although chlorine gas is less dangerous in weaponized form than other substances listed in the CWC, its use as a weapon is prohibited.

The United States needs to continue to be a leader in the fight to end the use of chemical weapons, but we need to support regional actors instead of putting American soldiers back in the region.

Q) *Regarding the House Benghazi Select Committee, should its investigation remain open-ended, or should the panel be given a deadline to complete its work? Please explain.*

A) The panel should be given a deadline to complete its work, and the right deadline may well have already passed. The panel has spent $5.5 million over its 19 month investigation and has not yielded a final report. The Select Committee has been dominated by partisan politics and not about figuring out what we can do to better protect our foreign outposts in the future.

The House Intelligence Committee already published a bipartisan report debunking many of the theories Republicans have pushed through the Benghazi Select Committee. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence likewise released a bipartisan report. It is time to end the grandstanding and work on advancing our regional interests and protecting our diplomats and soldiers.

Q) *What measures, if any, do you support to give U.S. authorities access to encrypted or “dark web” communications about potential terrorist plots? Please explain.*

A) This important discussion must first and foremost be grounded in technical reality rather than wishful thinking. As the only member of Congress who has designed integrated circuits and programmed in a variety of programming languages, I believe that there are two important technical points that must be made at the outset of this debate:

Firstly, in the medium and long run, it will be impossible to prevent sophisticated users (both terrorists and non-terrorists) from using encrypted communications. Forcing our commercial providers like Apple, Google, and Microsoft to install back doors to defeat encryption will weaken system security, and cause U.S. software manufacturers to lose market share to foreign providers or to freely available open-source alternatives. Thus encryption backdoors to provide “wiretap” capabilities are technically and commercially unworkable and will rapidly become a thing of the past. An excellent discussion of this is the MIT report entitled “Keys under Doormats” which is available on the Internet.

In contrast, “spyware” capabilities (deliberately compromising the operating system of computers or cell phones) will remain a technically viable surveillance option. Every manufacturer of cell phones and computer software maintains a heavily-guarded cryptographic key which allows them, and only them, to produce authenticated software updates. This gives manufacturers the technical capability of pushing a “spyware update” on individual users. The decision as to whether to force manufacturers to use this capability, and which users to use it against, is a question we need to continue to debate.

In the United States, we have given the courts, and in particular the FISA court, very broad power to direct companies to take specific actions against individuals suspected of terrorism. I believe that these powers should be restricted to specific individuals suspected of terrorism, and not be used to enable surveillance of large numbers of Americans with no probable cause to suspect them of terrorism.

Q) *Do you support transferring the detention of terrorism suspects from Guantanamo Bay to the United States? Why or why not?*

A) I believe indefinite detention without trial is cruel, unjust, and un-American. While nearly 800 people have been held at Guantanamo since 2002, only 166 remain. Of the 166 that remain, 86 have been determined not to be a threat to the United States and have been cleared for release; 34 will face criminal charges; and 46 were determined to be unfit for release because they are too dangerous, but there is insufficient evidence to successfully try them. It is clear that the 86 detainees cleared for release should be released. They have already cost taxpayers millions of dollars that would be better spent on things that can actually make us safer from real terrorist threats, like beefing up our oversight of visa and refugee admissions.

I voted for an amendment during consideration of the National Defense Authorization Act that would have established a framework to release those cleared and provide for a military tribunal to try the remaining detainees. We must provide for due process that allows us to assess the threats to our national security. It is time to end the practice of indefinite detention and close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. It is not enough to move detainees to the United States while continuing their detention without habeas corpus.

It should also be emphasized that there is no risk-free path forward. Retaining prisoners at Guantanamo means that it will continue be used as a very effective recruiting tool for ISIS and similar organizations. Releasing prisoners or transferring prisoners to third countries also has its own risks, but we cannot continue their detention indefinitely.

**Gun violence:**

Q) *What is the single most important action Congress can take to reduce U.S. gun violence?*

A) Congress should close the gun show loophole immediately. I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1217, the Public Safety and Second Amendment Rights Protection Act of 2015. This bill would expand the existing background check system to cover all commercial firearm sales, including those at gun shows, over the internet, or in classified ads while providing reasonable exceptions for family and friend transfers.

This bill has bipartisan support and is something we should accomplish now. It improves our system for background checks by incentivizing states to improve reporting of criminals and the dangerously mentally ill and by directing future grant funds toward better record-sharing systems.

This reflects compromise by both sides to help make our communities safer while protecting the rights recognized by the Supreme Court.

Q) *Do you support or oppose the ‘‘Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act?” Please explain your position.*

A) I am a cosponsor of the Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act and have signed the discharge petition to call the bill to the floor of the House of Representatives. Individuals who have been determined by the Attorney General to be a terrorism risk should not be able to buy firearms or explosives. The bill affords anyone who was denied the opportunity to bring suit challenging the denial. This would not prevent citizens from exercising their rights under the Supreme Court’s second amendment jurisprudence, but would create a process for preventing terrorists from buying guns in the United States.

**Climate change:**

Q) *Do you believe there is scientific evidence of climate change, and is it caused by human activity? What is your position on the Paris climate change agreement?*

A) As a physicist and the only Ph.D. scientist in Congress, I pay close attention to the evidence that should be supporting our policy decisions. The scientific consensus is clear: climate change is real and there is evidence that human activity has made a significant contribution to it. I support the international community’s tackling this challenge in a comprehensive and coordinated way. Aggressive goals that nations hold each other accountable for are the only way to solve what is truly a global problem.

At home, the most important action we can take is to expand investment in research and development of low-carbon energy sources and more efficient use of existing energy sources. I have twice sponsored amendments to increase funding for the Department of Energy’s Office of Science, the principal source of funding for our national laboratories, which conduct innovative research on new sources of low-carbon and renewable energy as well as improving ways to use existing sources of energy. For example, the Joint Center for Energy Storage Research at Argonne National Laboratory is conducting research to discover the next generation of batteries, which have the potential to transform ground transportation and energy delivery.

In the near term, the most important step that we can take to address climate change is to allow the EPA to implement sensible regulations that would reduce carbon emissions both by increasing energy efficiency and encouraging the transition to less carbon-intensive technologies.

**Economy:**

Q) *What changes, if any, to the U.S. tax code do you support and why?*

A) As someone who started a manufacturing company that now provides hundreds of good-paying jobs, and has kept those jobs in the Midwest, I understand the need to simplify the tax code. Our tax code is overly complex and filled with deductions and loopholes that solely benefit special interests rather than average citizens. As we work to revise our nation’s federal tax code, my top priorities are closing loopholes for companies that ship jobs overseas, and simplifying the code for businesses and middle-class families.

I support many of the provisions in the tax extenders bill that was recently adopted into law, like making permanent the Earned Income Tax Credit improvements and the R&D tax credit. The problem with this package is that it was not paid for and will create $622 billion of new debt in the first ten years. These decisions should have been made in the context of a comprehensive overhaul of our tax code that will not expand the deficit.

We also need to simplify our tax code and close loopholes. Eliminating corporate loopholes is the best thing we can do to lower the overall tax rate. We should not ask the middle class to bear an even bigger share of the burden while continuing to allow the wealthiest to take advantage of loopholes and avoid paying their fair share.

One issue we should address is the issue of businesses using corporate inversions to avoid paying US taxes by moving their headquarters overseas. In the last decade there have been more than 40 corporate inversions, costing U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars and taking thousands of jobs with them. This is just one of many examples of the urgent need to reform the tax code.

Q) *What are the most important actions Congress can take to ensure the solvency of Social Security?*

A) While Social Security is not a driver of the deficit, we should consider bipartisan common sense fixes to protect the program, such as raising or eliminating the cap on wages subject to Social Security tax and passing comprehensive immigration reform to expand the tax rolls and continue our steady economic growth.

While I am open to appropriate bipartisan proposals like these, we need to carefully consider any reforms to ensure that seniors still have access to the benefits they deserve and that we are making thoughtful reforms that are based on facts, not rhetoric.

Q) *Do you support a “risk fee” on big banks? Why or why not?*

A) The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act already has a “risk fee.” FDIC regulated banks pay deposit insurance premiums. Under Dodd-Frank, if any large institution fails, then the cost of that failure is recouped by a similar fee assessed on the financial service industry as a whole – rather than by the taxpayer. This is how the Dodd-Frank Act prevents taxpayer-funded bailouts.

Far more important than “risk fees” are *risk-based capital requirements*, which are also incorporated into Dodd-Frank. “Too Big to Fail” firms are now subject to a capital surcharge so that they must hold extra capital against the risks they impose on the economy at large. This also creates a disincentive for banks to grow above an economically efficient size.

Equally important are the “Total Loss Absorption Capacity” requirements being written by the regulators to be applied to the largest banks under Dodd-Frank. These require that large banks issue debt designed to absorb the losses if the bank gets into trouble and to provide liquidity without depending on the taxpayers.

Furthermore, the Supplementary Leverage Ratio requires large banks to hold an additional buffer of capital against all exposures, on and off the balance sheet. This makes sure that the derivatives products that turned a real estate bubble into a financial crisis have capital held against them.  
  
The net result of these reforms is that financial institutions today are not nearly as vulnerable as they were prior to the financial crisis. The financial system is far more robust, as evidenced by the fact that amidst all of the recent market chaos in China and elsewhere, there have been no signs of systemic risk to the U.S. financial system.

**Health care:**

Q) *Should Obamacare be overturned, left intact, or changed — and if so how?*

A) It is important to remember the purpose of health care reform: to make sure Americans have access to quality, affordable health care – especially those people who were being denied by their insurance companies because they weren’t profitable customers.  Insurance companies denied people with preexisting conditions and kicked people off when they got sick. That was ended, and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act has resulted in 16.4 million uninsured people getting coverage.

Further changes should expand coverage and help to curtail costs. I have supported commonsense changes to the law that would improve it, rather than repeal it. For example, I have voted to allow people to keep their health insurance plans that were slated for cancellation. I also led a letter to the Secretary of Health and Human Services asking her to require insurance companies to provide additional information and notification to anyone whose plan was cancelled. And I supported legislation to delay the employer mandate for one year.

I also support increased pricing transparency on the provider side of the market and allowing the government to negotiate drug prices for Medicare the same way they do for the VA.   
  
It is important that families do not face a penalty for the good policies negotiated in collective bargaining agreements. That is why I have cosponsored H.R. 2050, the Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2015.

Those who would repeal the Affordable Care Act have yet to explain how they would cover the millions of people who were uninsured before this bill passed. We cannot simply end those insurance plans and allow the uninsured rate to increase. Moreover, I do not support once again allowing insurance companies to deny insurance to children with pre-existing conditions, and to drop people’s coverage when they get sick. Now is not a time to move backwards.

Q) *Do you favor stripping federal funds from Planned Parenthood? Why or why not?*

A) No. I am a strong supporter of Planned Parenthood and the health care options it provides women. Planned Parenthood provides reproductive and health care services to women everywhere, and help families make informed decisions about contraception. They also provide safe and legal options for women who make the difficult choice to terminate a pregnancy.

Under the guise of preventing abortions, Republicans have sought to defund a critical provider of health care to women throughout our communities. These efforts, if successful, would disproportionately impact low-income populations and would only lead to an increase in unplanned pregnancies. I strongly oppose the efforts to defund Planned Parenthood.

**Immigration:**

Q) *President Obama used his executive powers to prevent the deportation of "DREAMers—youths who came to the U.S. illegally as children with their parents. Would you support legislation to prevent DREAMer deportations? Do you support putting DREAMers on a path to citizenship?*

A) I do support legislation to prevent DREAMer deportations. I recently had dinner with a family that could be split up without the President’s executive orders. Like so many families this would impact, they work hard, pay their taxes, contribute to our community, and are trying to create a better future for their children. They want to play by the rules, but are stuck in limbo because of our broken immigration system.

I support a path to citizenship and have advocated for DREAMers to be allowed to serve in our armed forces. The economic benefits of allowing undocumented immigrants to become citizens are clear. A study done by the Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy showed that immigration reform would increase state and local taxes in Illinois by almost $150 million a year. On the other hand, if all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Illinois, the state would lose $25.6 billion in economic activity, $11.4 billion in gross state product, and approximately 120,000 jobs.

I support the pathway to citizenship included in the comprehensive immigration reform bill that passed the Senate. The House companion bill was not allowed to be voted on or even debated. The pathway to citizenship included in both bills was tough but fair. It allows undocumented immigrants who maintain jobs and play by the rules to earn citizenship over 13 years, while also ensuring that immigrants who have committed serious crimes or pose a public safety risk are deported. In addition, it provides DREAMers with an expedited pathway to citizenship, which I strongly support.

**Education:**

Q) *What congressional reforms do you favor to address America’s student loan crisis?*

A) The financial burden we are placing on students is untenable. And what’s worse, these students, starting out life with massive debt, are unable to refinance when interest rates are lower. We allow people to refinance debt owed on a car, a home, or even credit cards, so why shouldn’t students have that same opportunity?

Interest rates continue to be very low and the gradual increases coming from the Federal Reserve will ensure rates stay below those of most student loans. However, student debt cannot be refinanced under current law. Allowing people to refinance this debt would greatly improve their ability to meet their obligations.

Student debt is holding the economy back, and allowing people to refinance to market rates would free up income to be spent in the local economy or to bolster savings.