**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: **LaDarius Curtis**

Ward: **24**

Occupation: **Self-employed**

Education: **High School: Providence St. Mel (Chicago), College: Kenyon College (Gambier, OH) MBA: Keller School of Management (Chicago)**

Previous political and civic experience:

**I served in President Barack Obama’s Administration in the Midwest region of the General Services Administration, as well as his U.S. Senate office from 2005-2012. I am a 7-year member of the Executive Board for Good City and an active member of Lawndale Christian Development Corporation's “Westside Men Can Cook” Program. I also worked on Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s campaign in 2002 and then-Senator Obama’s campaign in 2004.**

**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: **It depends.**

Please Explain:

**We can’t commit to a long-term solution for Chicago’s pension crisis until the Illinois Supreme Court decides on the constitutionality of current pension reform efforts. Once the ruling is announced I look forward to developing a comprehensive solution for Chicago’s unfunded pension liability.**

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?

**As I stated above, we need more guidance from the courts to find out what type of reform is even permissible. I support a more equitable tax structure, including a progressive income tax at the state level, to help better finance our schools, obligations, and city budget.**

**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?

**I would first like to see a concerted effort to restore a more equitable share of state funding to the City of Chicago. If we can pass a progressive income tax at the state level we should work to make sure some of that money is used in Chicago to fund our schools and pensions.**

**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. The last thing the city of Chicago wants to do is discourage non-residents from bringing their business and money. Chicago has just made strides with Google and other major companies making Chicago their home. We don’t want them looking to bolt back out to the suburbs because of some type of commuter tax.**

\* 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.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: **Yes**

Please explain:

**We need more resources allocated to promoting public safety and hiring more police. Especially in the 24th Ward.**

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

**The situation with illegal guns in Chicago is desperate. I support any sensible solutions that will reduce the influx of illegal guns onto our streets.**

**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: **It depends**

Please explain:

**I believe in democracy and accountability and giving people the power to hold their school representatives accountable seems perfectly reasonable to me. But I would like to see more specifics before committing fully to this proposal.**

**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:

**TIF funds should be used to revitalize our cities neediest neighborhoods and create new opportunities for residents.**

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

**We should make sure TIF funds are being used in our cities neediest neighborhoods and not used on projects that would already happen without them.**

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

**TIF funds have the potential to attract businesses and bring jobs to the 24th Ward that can adequately sustain our families. In City Council, I would fight for increasing the use of TIF funds in the 24th Ward.**

**Finding good, hardworking and dedicated employees is difficult. To encourage employers to hire local residents, I would streamline the job search process. My office would prepare a group of resumes of local residents for new employers in the 24th Ward.**

**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?

**My ward has a high number of residents that rely upon government services. They need a hard-working alderman who is accountable and available. Reducing the size of city council might save a small amount of money – especially when compared to the overall budget – but it would lessen the opportunities for our city’s neediest residents to have meaningful interactions with representatives of city government.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: **It depends**

Please explain:

**I would only support a properly planned casino that does not create traffic and crime problems for residents of that neighborhood. Any potential casino project should also create local jobs and guarantee a source of revenue for city schools or services.**

**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: **It depends**

Please explain:

**As long as the program can prove that it is accountable and improves public safety, I will support it. Cameras should be based on statistical evidence proving their necessity and should not be used as a long-term source of revenue.**

**11) Ward issues**

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

**I want to focus on four key priorities: economic development, homeownership, simple beautification, and more job opportunities.**

**I believe focusing on these four components will encourage current and prospective residents to strengthen ties to our community, encourage more businesses to move to the 24th ward, and stimulate a flow of economic resources I know our community deserves.**