**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

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**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: No, I support finding the revenue to put pensions on sound financial footing.

While I’m very interested in ensuring that all unnecessary or wasteful spending is scrubbed from the city budget, going forward we must be prepared to talk about tax policy that makes sense in a 21st century economy. I believe that the City Council should begin to have a serious debate about all potential streams of revenue, including virtually every proposal floated by Aldermen and the Mayor over the last few years. That said, I think real revenue reform should begin in Springfield. In my opinion, the place to start looking for revenue is with a sales tax on services. Right now, nearly half of the Illinois economy is exempt from sales tax. As the service sector continues to expand, we continue to fail to take advantage of those changing economic conditions. Simply put, Illinois and Chicago have a tax base that’s far too narrow and it makes no economic sense. The City Inspector General has estimated that a sales tax on services could raise approximately $450 million per year for the City of Chicago from its 2.25% share of the state sales tax. That revenue would go a very long way in fixing our current fiscal mess and in funding our pension obligations. I think it’s the right place to start.

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 noted above, I support an expansion of the sales tax to include an array of currently untaxed services from manicures to lawn care and cleaning services. I think this is the right first step to finding the revenue to fulfill our pension obligations and begin paying down our debt to Chicago’s police, firefighters, and other city workers who, for years, dutifully paid their share into the system. Recently, Aldermen have floated suggestions for everything from borrowing against TIF funds and a LaSalle Street tax, to a congestion and/or commuter tax – basically anything to avoid increases in property taxes. I think the Council and the Mayor ought to start by holding hearings to delve into the political viability and financial impact of any or all of these ideas. I think the solution probably lies in some combination of revenue sources and I would prefer to see us take a holistic approach and undertake an in-depth examination of all our options at once, rather than continue to nickel and dime taxpayers with incremental short-term solutions, like bad bond/borrowing deals or parking meter privatization deals, that only exacerbate the problem in the long run. Additionally, I think we should be discussing the option of a casino in Chicago, which would generate not only direct revenue, but also create jobs and spin-off revenue in the form of increased sales tax receipts, from spending by tourists who shop, dine, drink and stay in Chicago restaurants and hotels. Only after we have had a full debate about our other revenue options would I be interested in discussing an increase in property taxes. I think we are far too reliant on property taxes as it is.

**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?

Before increasing property taxes again, which I believe should only be considered as a last resort, the Council should have a real, honest and robust debate about all of the potential revenue sources on the table. As I said above, I prefer that we take a holistic approach to the debate on potential tax increases so our tax base is made broader and less dependent on property taxes. Additionally, Springfield must be part of this discussion. Legislators must be willing to look at raising revenue to help both the state, and cities like Chicago, which receive a percentage of certain taxes like the sales tax. I understand that property taxes directly fund CPS, but bringing more revenue into Illinois’ and Chicago’s general funds can also free up revenue that can be used to fund schools.

**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: As of now, I don’t support this proposal. But, I’m willing to listen to the debate. And, I don’t think debate should be shut down before discussions on this proposal have even begun.

\* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago’s trading exchanges, known as the “LaSalle Street tax”

Yes or No: As of now, I don’t support this proposal. But, I’m willing to listen to the debate. And, I don’t think debate should be shut down before discussions on this proposal have even begun.

Please explain your views, if you wish, on any of these three revenue-generating measures.

See above.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

No matter what neighborhood I’m speaking to in the Second Ward, I hear about voters’ concern for safe and clean streets and the ability to enjoy their neighborhoods without fear. With only a couple of exceptions, we have the ability to do that throughout the Second Ward. But, crime in the rest of the city is still of paramount concern. I was happy to see that Mayor Emanuel provided for increased foot and bike patrols for beat cops in his most recent budget. And, I support that effort. However, I am also firmly in support of putting even more police on the street. Especially in Chicago’s highest crime neighborhoods.

That said, “crime fighting” by police is largely a reactive strategy. I would also like to see us begin to have a very serious discussion about the root causes of crime and the larger issues that lead to some Chicagoans into a life of crime. Poverty, racism, a lack of access to reliable transportation and economic opportunity – these are things we can do something about if we work together. I want to see us do a better job of preventing crime before it starts.

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

Springfield has sometimes been slow to enact gun control legislation with real teeth, and I think it’s a mistake to wait for them to handle a problem that is impacting Chicago in ways few other cities in Illinois could begin to understand. So, I support Mayor Emanuel and the City Council’s recent efforts to do for themselves what Springfield would not or could not. I support the recently passed ordinance that forced gun stores to video-record sales and restrict gun buyers to one purchase a month, enacted strict zoning that restricts gun sales to only a few locations in the city, and required gun shop employees to pass background checks and train them to spot and stop “straw purchasers.”

**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: Yes.

Please explain: I am supportive of a hybrid-type school board that is both elected and appointed, with a majority of the seats being elected, at-large, by the people of Chicago. To me, it’s a question of maintaining appropriate checks and balances. I think the CPS Board should be made more accountable to parents of students in the system and to taxpayers through an election. However, I think the mayor (our current mayor, or the next one, or the one after that) should also be able to appoint some members of the board because I think disconnecting the mayor’s office from CPS entirely would be a mistake. No matter who occupies the 5th Floor of City Hall, that person should have some accountability for the schools and what happens to them. To strip that accountability from the mayor’s office could be disastrous for CPS. And, frankly, to the city. If the person serving in the role of mayor maintains some political accountability for what happens in the CPS system, then the balance of power will keep everyone working together to improve our schools. No individual school board member will ever be able to bring with them to their seat on the board the kind of cache and weight carried by the Mayor of the City of Chicago, whoever that may be. In my opinion representation of that voice on the board is required for CPS to thrive.

**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: Depends. I’m not in favor of losing out on the opportunity to use that money for much needed economic development, and job creation that goes along with it, in favor of covering budget gaps at CPS and other city agencies for only one year at a time. Declaring the surplus and moving the money over is a year-at-a-time, band-aid solution that merely delays solving the larger budget crisis at agencies like CPS.

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

I believe we have to get back to the original intention of TIF legislation, which was to help "blighted" communities rebuild. Also, I think we need a more robust and transparent accounting of where TIF dollars have gone and are earmarked to go – so the public is fully informed.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

As Alderman, economic development and job creation will be priorities of mine. The Second Ward is uniquely positioned to create jobs and generate significant economic activity for the city in two ways:

First, it is a ward with important cultural and economic significance to Chicago. It is home to renowned Chicago arts institutions such as Lookingglass and Royal George Theaters, along with the Museum of Contemporary Art. It has fabulous Chicago restaurants and hotels located in its boundaries, like Michelin-rated Schwa in Wicker Park, and The Drake. The ward’s shopping destinations include Water Tower on the east as well as funky locally-owned boutiques on the west. Its Bucktown boundary is one block south of the new 606 Chicago, which will not just rival New York’s High Line, it will put it to shame. And, because of its proximity to the 606, it is getting a new high-rise boutique hotel at the corners of North, Milwaukee and Damen that will bring tourism to western neighborhoods in the ward. Its eastern border is Oak Street Beach, making it the gateway to Chicago’s lakefront. These are only a few of its highlights. It is a ward that could be leveraged, with my leadership, to advance the Mayor’s aggressive, but doable, tourism goals, which I support both for their job creation potential and also as a source of desperately needed revenue. I would work diligently and aggressively with hotels, restaurants, labor, the Mayor’s office, Choose Chicago and neighboring colleagues to promote tourism and plans to move tourists beyond downtown and into our neighborhoods where they will shop, drink, dine and support local business. The Second Ward provides a unique opportunity to introduce tourists to a broad spectrum of Chicago’s neighborhoods spanning from the lakefront almost to Western Avenue.

Second, the Second Ward is home to potentially the largest Northside development opportunity the city has seen in decades – the redevelopment of the Finkl Steel land in the Clybourn Planned Manufacturing District. As Alderman, I would have significant influence over the direction of that development. I pledge to use it to impact, in whatever ways possible, the creation of jobs and promotion of sound labor practices and principles by developers who build on that land. The redevelopment of that Planned Manufacturing District holds the promise and possibility of significant job creation, not just because of the development inside the PMD, but also for the necessary transportation and infrastructure improvements I believe we would need surrounding it. The land itself could be redeveloped to recruit large business interests to the city and the jobs that come with those interests.

**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 cutting the number of Alderman by 20 to 25 for a few reasons:

First, I am a big believer in a strong legislative branch. I think having 50 Aldermen diffuses the potential for legislative strength and makes us more prone to having a “rubber stamp” City Council.

Second, the boundaries of wards are becoming absurd. With each redistricting they are becoming more and more gerrymandered. For example, the Second Ward is more of a collection of blocks than neighborhoods. Such gerrymandering makes governing and keeping communities of interest together very difficult. It can also lead to ridiculous results in zoning, landmark protection and neighborhood development that vary on a block by block basis because of the meandering nature of a ward map.

Third, with fewer aldermen, and larger wards, regional city planning among and between aldermanic offices could be more easily managed. We are not doing well with transportation and infrastructure planning and accounting for the long-term impact of development on neighborhoods and traffic patterns across ward boundaries. The larger the ward, the easier it would be to manage that impact and coordinate and consider big planning projects with neighboring Aldermen.

Fourth, with larger wards, Aldermen would be forced to represent people of very different socioeconomic backgrounds, races and ethnicities. I think this would be very good for Chicago. Right now, we have wards often drawn on the basis of race or ethnicity. Being forced to listen to different viewpoints in order to build a winning coalition within a ward would be a very good thing for the city. I do not think it’s appropriate for legislators to choose their constituents. Rather, I think the reverse is more democratic and I think being forced to listen to and understand someone leads to better more representative government.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

I believe a casino (or several) would be a great way to boost and promote Chicago as a tourism destination. Also, bringing casinos to Chicago would create much needed construction jobs, followed by permanent jobs, and boost tourism-related revenue for city coffers. They would also create the sort of “spin-off” revenue we need in cash-strapped Chicago – via dining, drinking, shopping and hotel taxes.

**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: I could be persuaded to support the city’s traffic camera program, but it must be drastically reformed and the technology must be proven and trustworthy.

Please explain:

Honestly, I feel conflicted about the program. It has been tainted with so many allegations of corruption and/or mismanagement that I think the public’s trust in the program has been completely undermined. The program has been riddled with problems ranging from improprieties in the awarding of contracts, and demonstrable ticket spiking caused by faulty equipment and some human error, to studies that show the program is not improving safety. On the other hand, I think if you are driving and you break the law and the technology is proven enough to catch you, then you should get your ticket and pay it. Additionally, in the areas around schools and parks, the speed cameras have changed my behavior. I received a couple of warnings and now I’m more aware, I slow down and I think other Chicagoans do too. That’s why revenue estimates for the speed cameras are falling short – people have slowed down and safer driving is a good thing.

On the other hand, I can see how the red light program is not working for Chicagoans. For example, at the corner of Ashland and Cortland, a major connector route for Second Ward commuters between Bucktown and Lincoln Park, drivers sit at the light and watch the camera flash repeatedly when nobody is moving. I have literally exchanged eye-rolls with fellow drivers over this. And, not surprisingly, that intersection is one that has been identified as having experienced a significant number of “spikes” in the issuance of tickets.

One thing is for certain, if we keep the speed and/or red light cameras, we owe it to taxpayers to promptly fix problems so law abiding Chicagoans do not get fined for faulty technology. At a minimum, the traffic camera program needs serious reform and more robust monitoring if it’s to continue.

**11) Ward issues**

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

The three concerns I hear most about are crime, schools and a general lack of faith in city government. And, the frequency with which I hear about these issues varies according to what part of the ward I’m visiting.

The first issue I hear about regularly is crime and safety. I will use my office to build stronger, more connected relationships between police and the people they serve. As Alderman, I will invite CAPS representatives to be present in my office during ward nights so my constituents can speak with police while they are waiting to visit with me or staff. I will also invite CAPS representatives to join me at my pop-up offices in libraries and grocery stores. I will work with all four commanders who cover portions of the Second Ward to brainstorm creative ways to strengthen communication between neighbors and the CPD with the hope of reducing crime by strengthening the dialogue between citizens and police. I will also closely watch the city’s budget to ensure the CPD is fully funded and I will fight to get more police positions added to the budget as well.

On the west side, where young families with school-age children are more plentiful, I frequently hear complaints from ward residents about their fear of sending their kids to neighborhood schools and their belief that they pay enough in taxes to ensure that their neighborhood school should be a good, viable option for them should they choose to stay in the city. I also frequently hear that young families believe that if their kids are not able to get into a magnet school, then the only option for them is to leave the city for the suburbs. Because I believe that local schools are an essential building block of thriving neighborhoods, and the key to keeping Chicago competitive well into the future, I will make them a top priority. I will work with neighborhood organizations, Second Ward families, Chambers of Commerce, teachers, and their union, to develop collaborative relationships intended to strengthen and improve neighborhood schools so they are viewed as viable options for families tempted to leave the city for suburban schools they believe to be better. Besides improving schools for the sake of improving schools, we cannot grow and thrive as a city unless we keep those families here and expand the tax base. Without a growing tax base, we will just continue to tread water.

Lastly, as I talk with voters, I have been saddened by their deep distrust of city government, and what feels to me like a persistent cynicism. In general, voters seem to think that pay-to-play politics and crooked Aldermen are to be expected. I hope to help change this perception. Leaders cannot govern effectively and efficiently without support from those they serve. I was troubled by Legislative Inspector General Faisal Khan’s recent report which concluded that City Council employees were doing political work on the taxpayer’s dime. IG Khan also asserted that, in some cases, he did not have sufficient information to even determine whether employees were doing political work on city time because Aldermen refused to keep time sheets and adequate records. I believe in accountability and transparency. And, I also believe that sunlight is the greatest disinfectant. Having come from a law firm where I spent ten years accounting for my time in six-minute increments, I think it’s the least we can do for taxpayers to give them a sense of how we spend our time working for them. In my office, we will lead by example – my staff will be required to keep time sheets and they will be turned over to the Inspector General and the public whenever we are asked to provide them. Additionally, as Alderman, I plan to disclose each and every meeting I take in my official capacity along with the subject matter. Chicagoans pay the Council’s salaries. They have the right to know how Aldermen and their staffs are working to serve them. Also, for government to work well, I need Second Ward voters to believe in my office, and my leadership. So, I will make it as easy for them to do that as I possibly can. I’m looking forward to earning the public trust. And, perhaps helping to restore some faith in city government.