**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Ted Williams

Ward: 9th

Occupation: Political Science Faculty, City Colleges of Chicago

Education: MPP, University of Chicago BA, Rutgers University

Previous political and civic experience:

Ted Williams III is an educator and activist who has taught Political Science at Chicago State University and is currently the Chairman of the Social Science Department at Kennedy-King College. He is the former host of PBS-WYCC television’s *The Professors* and has provided political commentary for BET-TV, NBC-TV, WGN-TV, *Upfront with Jesse Jackson*, *PRI’s Smiley and West*, and WVON radio in addition to a host of periodicals. He holds degrees in Public Policy Studies from the University of Chicago and Rutgers University where he studied under former New Jersey Governor Jim Florio. Williams served on the team that negotiated the first successful union contract for part-time City Colleges’ faculty and presently serves on the newly formed Chicago Public Schools’ Far Southside Community Advisory Council. He served as a state-wide spokesman for school reform and advised the team that successfully lobbied for extending the age of healthcare insurance coverage for students in Illinois. He has hosted a series of community town hall meetings and has worked on a myriad of public issue campaigns including surrounding environmental justice, healthcare, school reform, and the elimination of food deserts in urban communities.  Furthermore, he is the founder of the 3rd Dimension Performance Group, an arts-based company that has provided production services for various clients and performing arts instruction for hundreds of young people in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs. He is the author of the theatrical production TORN the Musical, and of the book The Way Out: Christianity, Politics, and the Future of the African American Community. Williams considers his most important work his role as a church minister at The Way Christian Ministries and as a husband and father to his wife Roslyn and their three beautiful children, Gabrielle, Amaris, and Ted IV.

**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:

Any efforts to restructure the pension system must be carefully handled. Our police and fire fighters have earned their benefits. Fiscal responsibility is important, however, it must be balanced with the goal of meeting our current obligations. I would only support reducing future benefits in limited fashion based on a number of additional factors.

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?

The city must be fully faithful to its pension commitments. Currently only 50% of our 6 pension funds are fully funded. This issue deserves great attention. However, I would only support a property tax increase when all other revenue generating and cost-cutting measures have failed.

**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?

Because of the political difficulty surrounding the pension crisis, ambitious solutions are required. I support a variety of efforts including re-financing our current debt and insuring that new employees have a different structure than current employees.

**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:

Possibly

\* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city

Yes or No:

No

\* 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:

Targeted policing tactics have been effective at fighting crime. In cities around the nation, targeted policing, community-based efforts, and adding additional officers have proven to be viable options. Gun buy-back programs and youth engagement initiatives are as well. Combating crime must be a holistic effort that includes gun control, youth programming, and increasing economic opportunity.

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

 Since 2000, more than half of the guns seized by police in Chicago came from other states. A recent University of Chicago study showed that over 1,300 guns confiscated by police since 2008 were purchased at one Indiana store.[[1]](#footnote-1)  Thousands of legally purchased guns from other areas land on the streets of Chicago each year and contribute to the city’s widespread crime.

I support legislation that prohibits “straw buying” at gun shows, extends background checks, and further prosecutes gun owners whose guns are used in crimes.

**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:

The Board of Education should be elected by the public as democracy requires shared decision-making. Education is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Our diverse communities require diverse, community-based, and publically accountable leadership. The mayor should not be the only voice determining the face of Chicago’s school board.

**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:

Possibly

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

The city's use of TIF funds requires a higher level of public accountability. I support a variety of efforts designed to assure public access to the decision-making process surrounding the use of TIF funds. I fully support the extension of TIF districts in the ward, however, our current TIF system is used disproportionately to benefit the areas in and surrounding the loop. The TIF program is a good tool in fighting urban blight. We must guarantee that our most challenged areas receive their fair share of these funds. The current program requires a much greater level of accountability to insure that the money is spent in our most deserving communities, communities like the 9th ward. All future usage of TIF dollars should go through the process of public hearings and community input.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

I support the expansion of workforce development and job training occurring through institutions like the City Colleges. Furthermore, I plan to develop a business incubator in the ward that secures funding for small businesses, attracts larger businesses, and fosters a relationship between the business owners and local community. It will help to identify additional capital sources, support business friendly zoning, and host a yearly competition for small business in the ward. Additional issues include:

* Creation of a far Southside arts district
* Work to expand the SSA small business development program
* Attract high quality and diverse food, shopping, and entertainment options to the ward. This can be done through a combination of marketing efforts, tax incentives, and workforce development. Local residents should not have to travel to enjoy the best our world class city has to offer.
* Insure that local development is done by businesses from within the community. Both zoning and contract opportunities should reflect the goal of local residents having primary access.
* Develop a long term business and workforce development plan to assure that the 9th ward becomes a serious stakeholder and producer in the global economy

**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?

The current size is sufficient to insure that all residents of the city receive representation.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: No

Please explain:

I am supportive of a variety of tourism and revenue generating options. These include efforts like the George Lucas Museum and additional proven family friendly options. Casinos bring many social challenges that our city can ill afford.

**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:

No.

Please explain:

Given the recent reports of malfunctioning cameras and their disproportionate presence in economically challenged communities, the use of red-light cameras must be re-evaluated. Most reports suggest that their focus is revenue generating rather than securing public safety. For these reasons, I support a significant reduction of red light cameras in the city.

**11) Ward issues**

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

**Economic Development:** Around the nation, communities like the 9th ward have been ravaged by a lack of investment and access to capital to build local businesses. Small businesses are the key to the growth of any community. Locally owned, independent businesses return 68% of their income to the local economy. This re-investment is critical to the long-term development of the 9th ward. When elected, I will build a 9th Ward Business Incubator. Our team will aggressively pursue not only additional business investment, but also will secure local, state, and national sources of funding to support small business development. The incubator will sponsor a yearly local business competition to create and grow small businesses in the ward.

**Crime and Violence:** The development of youth in the ward should be one of the chief foci of ward resources. Not only will I work to support existing community based organizations on the far Southside, but also, I will work towards creating additional youth programmatic and employment opportunities designed to give our youth alternatives. Lastly, I will support the Council’s current efforts to restrict gun sales in the city and work with the area police force to create additional initiatives designed to reduce the number of guns available on the streets.

**Education:** Every child deserves a high quality education. After witnessing the closing of over 50 public schools in Chicago in the last year, our schools need advocates. I will push for an elected school board that is responsible to citizens when these kinds of decisions are made. Furthermore 85% of CPS students receive free and reduced lunch. This is a clear indication that our students need additional support beyond that which happens in the classroom. Education truly requires a variety of community stakeholders to support the holistic development of children. I will advocate at the state level for education funding reform, and provide parents with both financial and informational resources for securing quality educational options for their children.

1. Monica Davey, “Strict Gun Laws in Chicago Can’t Stem Fatal Shots,” The New York Times (January 30, 2013): A1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)