**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Name:** Rahm Emanuel

**Occupation:** Mayor, City of Chicago

**Education:** BA, Sarah Lawrence; Masters, Northwestern University

**Previous political and civic experience:**

I began my career with the consumer rights organization Illinois Public Action. I worked on Paul Simon’s 1984 election to the U.S. Senate and in 1989 served as a senior adviser and chief fundraiser for Mayor Daley. I then served as a senior adviser to President Bill Clinton. After leaving the White House, I returned to Chicago to take a job in the private sector before running for Congress. I was elected by the people of the 5th congressional district to four terms before being asked by President Obama to serve as his chief of staff. I returned home and was elected Mayor in 2011.

**1) Top Priorities**

**Please name your top three priorities for the city, and explain how you will make changes in those three areas.**

My three priorities remain the strength of our neighborhood schools, safety of our streets, and ensuring every neighborhood shares in economic prosperity by creating jobs and supporting vital infrastructure, parks and cultural institutions.

1. Strengthening our neighborhood schools

While the Chicago Public Schools have never been stronger, there remains much work to do. Graduation rates, attendance and test scores are all at record highs, but we should not feel satisfied until every student from every neighborhood is guaranteed the same high-quality education. There is a lot to be proud of: after four years of investments and reform, Chicago provides students with a full school day that will provide a student entering kindergarten nearly 2.5 additional years of instructional time by the time they graduate high school. For the first time, all 30,000 CPS kindergarten students receive a full day of kindergarten and 75% of 3 and 4-year olds below the poverty line have access to quality pre-school options. In addition, students and families have more high-quality school options including strong neighborhood schools strengthened by investments in International Baccalaureate and STEM programs, magnet, gifted, charter, and military schools. Finally, we have begun the transformation of our City Colleges by tying the curriculum to the strongest industries and providing greater supports for students. The graduation rates have doubled and our new STAR scholarship program will further open the doors of opportunity to more CPS students.

But we still have more to do to ensure that every child has access to a world-class learning experience from birth. If I’m fortunate enough to be re-elected, my administration will continue to pursue an education agenda built around five themes – expanding diverse and rigorous high-quality public education options for all Chicago families, empowering principals and teachers with greater autonomy and holding them accountable for performance, investing in student supports, engaging and empowering parents, and challenging the district to innovate to make Chicago a city of learning. I will lay out those plans in more detail over the coming weeks.

Though we have come a far way since Education Secretary Bill Bennett said Chicago's schools were the worst in the nation, we have not come close to realizing our true potential. If we keep making critical investments and making the tough choices to put our kids ahead of politics, we will continue seeing record gains and achieve our goal of ensuring every child from every community has access to an excellent public education.

2. Ensuring safety in every neighborhood

I describe our holistic public safety strategy in question 6 below.

3. Expanding economic opportunity

In addition to our small business and economic development strategy outlined in question 5 below, we have implemented an aggressive infrastructure campaign to ensure every community is connected to each other and to jobs downtown. Building A New Chicago is a $7 billion infrastructure program and one of the largest investments in infrastructure in the City’s history. The three-year program has touched nearly every aspect of the city’s infrastructure network and by the end of next year will have created and supported more than 30,000 jobs. Already, more than 1,000 total miles of streets have been resurfaced, water and sewer mains rebuilt, and street lights replaced. We have also completed or begun transit improvements that amount to one of the largest infrastructure investments in the history of the CTA. This includes rebuilding the Red Line South, overhauling the Blue Line O’Hare branch, and refurbishing more than 100 CTA Stations across the City. Finally, we have invested in bicycling infrastructure and promoted education, awareness and advocacy. Chicago now has more than 200 miles of on street bikeways, 89 miles of which are protected, buffered and shared bike lanes, many miles of off-street paths, more than 14,500 bike racks, and sheltered, high-capacity, bike parking areas at many CTA rail stations. Taken together, these investments have significantly expanded affordable transportation options to all parts of the city.

**2) 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?**

Ensuring the city’s pension funds are on a sustainable path to protect employee retirement savings and Chicago taxpayers is integral to getting the city’s finances back on track. I have been clear that I reject the false choice of either bankrupting the retirement security of hard-working City employees, or making Chicago taxpayers bear the burden along by relying only on substantial tax increases. Over the last three years, my administration has worked collaboratively with the Municipal and Laborers Pension Funds to craft a long-term solution that achieves this goal. This reform will provide the retirement security that 61,000 workers and retirees have earned – all while respecting our taxpayers and protecting vital City services. We changed the compounding cost of living adjustments (COLA) to a simple adjustment, and implemented three COLA pauses in the next seven years to give the fund a chance to catch its breath. Active city employees will see a 2.5% increase in their contribution that is phased in over five years. And we raised the multiplier that the City currently uses and moves it on a path to an actuarially-determined structure in the near future. We applied the same strategy to our successful solution to the Park District pension fund that was on a path to become insolvent in less than a decade. This collaborative approach can and should be applied to crafting the solution for Police and Fire Funds. To date, I am the only elected official to successfully pass pension reform legislation that was executed in collaboration with workers while incurring enough savings to protect taxpayers.

I also believe that savings that can be reinvested in the pension system do not just come from raising taxes or cutting retirement payments. The changes to retiree health care benefits, for example, were very difficult to make but necessary in order for us to balance our budget and put our City on stronger financial footing. We took a balanced approach: rather than pull the rug out from retirees when the Korshak settlement expired, my administration put forward a three-year phase out of the health plan for all retirees except those of the original Korshak plaintiff's class – some our oldest and most vulnerable retirees. For those retirees and their spouses, the city will continue to provide health care for the remainder of their lives. For the rest of the retirees the three-year phase out of this benefit will allow participants to enroll in alternative plans through the affordable care act. This reform will save $100 annually.

**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?**

I have always said that raising taxes should be a last resort to tackling the pension crises. As I have done with other pension deals reached over the last four years, we will look for all available reforms and savings before considering a tax increase.

**3) 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?**

Investing in our children's future is a top priority and despite budget constraints CPS continues to make significant investments in schools, programs, and facilities that will benefit students in all Chicago neighborhoods across the city. Through $750 million in central office, administrative and operational cuts, we will ensure the funding stays where it belongs – with the students in classrooms across the city. But moving forward we must address the looming budget crisis with a far broader strategy. To start, I continue to work with our partners in Springfield to reform the pension system and give Chicago its fair share of education funding. Last year, Springfield passed pension reform for all school districts in Illinois except Chicago. Equally problematic, the state of Illinois budget pays the full pension cost for all school districts other than Chicago. Between these two disparities, Chicago is losing out on hundreds of millions of dollars in financial relief that can directly impact our classrooms. I will continue to work in Springfield to correct these disparities and fight to make sure that Chicago is no longer treated differently when it comes to education funding and pension relief.

**4) 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

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

**Yes or No:** No

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

I support a statewide expansion of the sales tax base to include more consumer services, as I outlined in my first campaign for Mayor. I am opposed to any form of city income tax, including the so-called commuter tax. Setting aside the legal obstacles to implementing it, I do not think Chicago workers should be asked to pay more out of their paychecks. The financial transaction tax has always been a bad idea for Chicago, which is why more than a decade ago the entire Illinois congressional delegation – both Democrats and Republicans – opposed legislation to implement the tax, which would require federal action.

**5) Economic development**

**What will you do as mayor to bring jobs to the city and boost economic development?**

I took office on the heels of the worst recession since the Great Depression and after a decade in which 200,000 Chicagoans left the city. Soon after becoming mayor, I convened experts and stakeholders from across the city to create a Plan for Economic Growth and Jobs. We have used this plan as a roadmap, focusing on recruiting companies and growing those that are already here as well as making Chicago a better place to do start and grow a business. We have also made a series of strategic investments in high growth industries such as digital manufacturing, advanced batteries, and technology services. Chicago is starting to see results: the economy has grown by 73,000 jobs since I took office and unemployment is down by a third since 2011, a larger drop than any major city in the U.S.

From day one we focused on kick starting economic growth in our neighborhoods.  In my first few months of taking office, we put the employer head tax – which reduced incentives to hire new workers by taxing business owners for each employee – on the road to elimination by the end of 2013.  This reform has saved business owners $40 million from 2012 – 2014 and will save them $25 million a year going forward. We secured $6 million from the Bloomberg Foundation to create an innovation team in the Mayors office that focuses mainly on improving the business climate in Chicago. In two years, the team slashed the number of licenses by 60 percent and is saving business owners $1.3 million a year in reduced license fees. They also streamlined the startup process for new restaurants and reduced the time to open a restaurant by 33 percent, and established the Small Business Center, which has reduced the time a business owner stands in line at City Hall by 50 percent.

We also invested $1 million in launching the first-in-the-nation microlending program that has since helped more than 120 small business owners with $1.1 million in loans and will help 100 businesses a year in the future.  And through the “Chicago Neighborhoods Now” plan, we have helped bring $4 billion in public and private investment to seven targeted neighborhoods in the city for coordinated public and private investment initiatives. The plan brought a revitalized Red Line South and billions of dollars in other public transit, water and street investments. It also brought Method’s first manufacturing facility in the U.S. to the Pullman neighborhood, a Whole Foods to Englewood, and the $45.6 million “Shops and Lofts” project at 47th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, among others.

Though our economy is on the mend and our downtown is the fastest growing in the country, we must do more to ensure that residents in every neighborhood benefit from this growth. In the next four years, we will build upon our citywide economic plan by creating growth plans for each of our neighborhoods. We will work to identify additional incentives for bringing businesses and jobs to struggling neighborhoods. Following our success at reducing the number of business licenses by 60 percent and slashing the amount of time it takes to start a restaurant by one-third, I will implement reforms to streamline our permitting and zoning processes. We will expand lending options for our small businesses, based on the success of our microlending program. And we will maintain momentum in our high-growth industries like technology, advanced manufacturing, energy, and biomedicine by identifying new reforms and incentives and partnering with the federal and state governments to invest further.

**6) Crime**

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

With more police officers per capita than any other major city, my focus has been on transforming the police department, moving cops from behind their desks to the streets, significantly expanding prevention programs and cracking down on illegal guns. Despite the fact that we are experiencing the fewest murders than any year since 1965, and the lowest crime rate in decades, the measure of our success is whether a parent feels comfortable letting their child be outside. Until every parent in every community shares that same sense of security, we have more work to do. That is why I implemented a comprehensive crime reduction approach when I took office, incorporating the voices of law enforcement, community leaders and clergy to address the role of policing, prevention and the community in our common mission to reduce violence.

The Chicago Police Department has seen a dramatic change at all levels. At the top there is new leadership held accountable through CompStat, and among the ranks there are more than 1,100 new recruits adding new energy to the department for the first time in a decade. We have moved officers from behind desks to behind the wheel of a squad car – or the handlebars of a bike. At the same time, we are utilizing those resources more efficiently through intelligence-based policing. Operation Impact, which adds hundreds of officers on foot patrol in 20 areas that account for 3% of the city’s population but 20% of its crime, has led to a dramatic decline in violence in those areas where officers are more visible and able to interact with community members. Through the Two Degrees of Association program, CPD has identified 500 individuals at highest risk of violence and has reached out to many of them to offer connections to services. In 2014, we formed a multi-agency task force on domestic violence and are piloting a program to help identify households at serious risk of injury or fatality. CPD has also shifted its focus away from low-level and non-violent drug crimes and towards preventing and stopping violent crime. As part of that strategy, the Mayor worked with City Council to pass a city law permitting civil citations for possession of small amounts of cannabis. That law has resulted in a nearly 40% decrease in arrests for small amounts of cannabis possession for the first half of 2014 compared to the same time period in 2012.

The strategy is not just about locking more people in jail, which has significant long-term costs to the City and County. In fact, citywide arrests for all crimes have declined by 11% while overall crime has declined by 27% and clearance rates have improved by 18% -- proving it is possible to reduce crime while arresting fewer people and fostering better cooperation with the communities we serve.

Developing higher levels of trust between communities and police has been a major priority for this administration. CPD created and implemented training for police officers to teach fairness and respect – also called “procedural justice.” To date, more than 9,500 Chicago police personnel have completed this training. When police misconduct does occur, we are committed to responding swiftly and fairly and providing a new level of transparency about the process. Over the last 18 months, the Independent Police Review Authority, which investigates all serious police misconduct, has reduced its case backlog by 51% by streamlining its intake procedures, expanding the use of mediation, and holding personnel accountable for timely investigations. And, in a reversal of past practice, the City recently announced that it will make internal investigation files into alleged police misconduct open to public scrutiny.

While the Chicago Police Department plays a critical role in reducing crime in Chicago, we know cannot arrest our way out of the problem. Chicago’s holistic, public health approach to violence reduction includes investments in prevention and intervention programs to help treat the root causes of violence, including poverty, trauma and disparities in education and workforce skills. Key prevention investments include, but are not limited to, universal Pre-K for families in poverty, an increase from 14,000 to 22,500 summer jobs through One Summer Chicago Plus, teen dating violence prevention, 150 refurbished basketball courts, 175 playground improvements, and 750 Night out in the Parks events. Intervention programs, which are designed to reach youth at higher risk of violence, include One Summer Chicago Plus, a summer jobs program specifically designed for justice-involved youth. Participants in the program were 43% less likely to be arrested for a crime than their peers – results that last for more than a year after the program ended, according to research published in Science Magazine. Other intervention efforts include replacing zero-tolerance school discipline with restorative practices, resulting in over 30% declines in out-of-school suspensions, referrals for expulsions and arrests of students.

To strengthen and build on the City’s public health approach to violence prevention, earlier this year we formed the Mayor’s Commission for a Safer Chicago. The Commission brings together over 130 City staff, community and faith leaders, practitioners, parents and youth to update the City’s plan to address violence. United in a belief that violence is preventable and not inevitable, the Mayor’s Commission for a Safer Chicago represents a new way of doing business: a model of shared vision, shared action and shared responsibility. In December 2014, the Commission will publish recommendations in youth employment, health, restorative practices in schools, safety and justice, and safe places and activities.

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

Despite the progress noted above, we continue to have a gun problem – driven in large part by the ease with which someone can go to the suburbs, Indiana or Wisconsin to easily purchase a weapon or get it through a straw purchaser. Chicago Police currently take more illegal guns off the streets than police in NYC and LA combined. Until we have better state and federal laws to keep these guns out of our communities in the first place, we’ll continue to face challenges. We should begin by passing the Chicago gun store ordinance on the state level. This would require all gun dealers in Illinois – which account for 40% of the guns recovered in Chicago crime scenes, to implement best-practice policies such as training, security plans, inventory audits, tracking merchandise recovered in crimes, employee background checks, and videotaping the point of sale.

**7) 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 members and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?**

I am comfortable with the current responsibilities given to the mayor and the school board. At a time when we're seeing gains across the board – from record high graduation rates of 69%, on pace to reach 82% in three years, to record high attendance rates and record low expulsions – the last thing we need is more politics in our schools. There continues to be significant elected representation at the local level through Local School Councils that approve budgets and principal hiring.

**8) 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?**

I support a consistent, transparent TIF surplus strategy that is based on the needs of each community and does not fluctuate based on the whims of elected officials in a specific fiscal year. That’s why I established the city’s first-ever TIF surplus policy through Executive Order to formalize and expand the practice of declaring a TIF surplus. The policy requires the declaration of a surplus in TIF districts that are older than three years, were not created for single redevelopment projects, are not transferring funds to other TIF districts to pay legacy school debt service costs, and have a balance of at least $1 million. The amount of the surplus must be at least 25 percent of the available cash balance in the TIF, after accounting for current and future project commitments and contingencies, revenue volatilities, tax collection losses, and tax liabilities.

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

I am committed to continuing the TIF reforms that were implemented during my first term in office. Soon after taking office, I launched the TIF Reform Task Force to provide me with recommendations for increasing transparency and accountability, improving performance, and strengthening oversight.  Since the task force issued its report in August 2011, we have implemented many of the recommendation,

First, we have eliminated unnecessary TIFs, reducing the number of TIF districts by 15 since taking office. Second, to promote increased transparency and accountability, we created a comprehensive online TIF database that tracks all projects in one place, provides public access to performance data and dashboard, and an online TIF Portal that provides an easy to navigate geography-based representation of TIF districts and project data. Using the TIF Portal, Chicagoans for first time can review TIF project data on a map; by address, project name, TIF district name, and or a ward number. Third, we now require every proposed private development TIF project to have an assessment report that will be posted online before City Council consideration and will outline the project’s ability to create jobs and provide return on investment for the city. Finally, I established the city’s first-ever TIF surplus policy noted above.

Going forward, we will identify opportunities to deepen these reforms to ensure that taxpayer dollars are put to their highest and best use.

**9) 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 believe we have higher priorities in Springfield than changing the size of City Council.

**10) A Chicago casino**

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

The decision to place a casino in Chicago would have to be very carefully considered to ensure it has the needed positive impact on the City’s economy without negative social effects that are common at gambling establishments, and that it would provide a dedicated revenue stream to rebuild the city’s infrastructure.

**11) Red light and speed cameras**

**Does the city have an acceptable number of red light and speed cameras currently, and are they properly employed?**

As in hundreds of other cities, Chicago’s red light camera program has proven to be an effective tool in making our streets safer for drivers, bikers and pedestrians. At intersections with red light cameras the number of crashes that result in injuries have fallen by 22 percent. From 2005 to 2012, the number of people injured at intersections with red light cameras dropped from 1023 to 798. But the red light camera program can only be effective if the public trust is as strong as the public safety impact.

My administration inherited this system and took quick action with the Inspector General when we learned of problems. I fired Redflex when we learned of fraud, and implemented a much more thorough level of accountability when a new operations contract was awarded. The new vendor has more advanced camera equipment and analysis capabilities. The vendor was required to establish an early warning system to identify ticketing anomalies, hold more frequent management meetings to review performance with Chicago Department of Transportation officials, and post ticket data on the City’s open data portal to ensure full transparency for motorists and taxpayers.

My administration continues to work with the Inspector General when needed to ensure we are constantly monitoring and improving the system.