**Name: Theresa Mah**

**District running for: Illinois General Assembly - 2nd House District**

**Political party: Democrat**

**Political/civic background:**

**· Senior Policy Advisor for former Governor Pat Quinn**

**· Local School Council Member: Thomas Kelly High School**

**· UIC Task Force: Educational Opportunities for Undocumented Students**

**· Bridgeport Alliance: Co-Founder and leader in the campaign to restore 31st Street bus route**

**· Chinese-American Museum: Advisory Board Member**

**· Coalition for Better Chinese-American Community (CBCAC), Policy Advisor**

**Occupation: Educator, Policy Consultant**

**Education: Ph.D. in U.S. History - University of Chicago**

**Masters - University of Chicago**

**Bachelors of Arts in History – University of California, Berkeley**

**Campaign website: www.theresamah.com**

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

**Taxes/Budget:**

**Q. *Illinois has a massive state debt and crushing pension debt. Many elected officials from the governor to state lawmakers have indicated there is a need for additional revenue to help balance the budget. If Illinois needs to generate additional revenue, which options would you support in a budget package:***

***1. Increase the state’s income tax on individuals or corporations, either temporarily or permanently.***

***2. Expand the sales tax to services.***

***3. Tax retirement income in excess of $50,000.***

***4. Adopt a progressive income tax.***

**I would create additional revenue by closing the corporate tax loopholes that allow more than 65% of corporations in Illinois to avoid paying taxes to the State. It is fundamentally unfair to ask people making minimum wage to pay income tax while corporations are given a free ride.**

**I believe that we can move significantly in the direction of a balanced state budget if we implement a Millionaire’s Tax, which was approved by 70 percent of voters in the 2014 referendum. I also believe that we can gain needed revenue by closing loopholes that currently allow two thirds of corporations to pay no taxes, implement a miniscule tax on financial transactions, and work toward a progressive tax system in Illinois.**

***If you oppose all tax hikes, please provide specifics on how you would reduce state spending by $7 billion to balance the state budget.***

1. **I have outlined above how we can begin getting our hands around the the state’s budget problems.**

**Q) *Do you support another legislative attempt at pension reform? If so, which proposed changes in the pension system would you support that you believe would pass constitutional muster?***

1. **I respect the State Supreme Court’s ruling that the previous attempt at pension reform was unconstitutional and therefore future attempts are unlikely to pass constitutional muster.**

**Q) *Do you support a budget template developed by a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators that would allow members to pass a budget without the consent of the legislative leaders?***

1. **A template is an interesting idea and I would have to see specifics prior to definitively answering the question. However, the budget impasse is a key reason why I support term limits for legislative leaders.**

**Education:**

**Q) *What, if anything, should we do to change how we fund schools?***

1. **The current way that schools are funded, with such a significant percentage dependent on local property taxes, perpetuates vast inequities that persist between school districts in wealthier communities compared to those with a larger proportion of impoverished areas. I am a proponent of alternative methods of funding our education system so that the distribution of funding for our schools can be more equitable and does not unfairly penalize children who live in school districts with limited ability to raise needed funds from property taxes.**

**Q) *Do you favor the state picking up the pension costs for Chicago teachers, as the state does for teachers outside Chicago? Do you favor school districts outside Chicago picking up their own pension costs, as Chicago does now?***

1. **Since Chicago is treated differently from the rest of the state, I believe that whatever solution the legislature decides on should be one that is more equitable than the current approach. Given the inequity in the current system, I do favor the state picking up pension costs for Chicago teachers.**

**Q) *State support for public higher education has declined for two decades. Do you favor the status quo or a significant increase in state funding? What is your plan to restore Illinois’ leadership in public higher education?***

**A) As one of my top priorities I will work with public universities and elected officials to bring forward comprehensive solutions to this growing problem. I think there are two ways to address this problem. One is from the State’s side - we must increase MAP funding so the students who academically prepared but financially strapped can attain a college degree. The second approach is from the cost side of public universities. We must get a better understanding of the reasons for the rising cost to determine where potential savings can be found without affecting instruction quality. I think it would be helpful to ask the State Auditor General to look into the reason for the rising cost of higher education in Illinois.**

**Transportation:**

**Q) *Illinois has a tremendous backlog of infrastructure needs: roads, bridges, waterways, transit. What would be a good way to pay for it? Do you support an increased gas tax — and/or other taxes and fees — to finance infrastructure improvements, including public transit?***

**A) I believe a gas tax is another tax on working people of Illinois. People are flat out of patience and flat out of money to pay for another tax! This tax would disproportionately tax middle-class commuters, and I am opposed to regressive measures to raise revenue.**

**Q) *Illinois’ public transportation formula provides money for operating costs, but not capital costs. Should Illinois create a reliable funding stream for capital costs?***

**Yes**

**Jobs:**

**Q) *Illinois has long been a strong manufacturing state. Today, Illinois employs fewer than 600,000 manufacturing workers and manufacturing’s share of the Gross State Product has dropped to 12.4 percent. Our state saw the loss of nearly 10,000 manufacturing jobs in 2015 and announcements from some high-profile companies of job losses. The average manufacturing job pays more than $70,000 and helps create a strong middle class. Name the top three things that you would do to help attract and retain manufacturing jobs in Illinois.***

**1. Leverage current state resources by demanding that in order to receive tax dollars, education institutions (public and private; high school, community college and 4 year colleges) and manufacturers must cooperate in designing education, training and placement programs that truly meet the needs of students, workers, employers and the greater society.**

 **2. Pass the Illinois Clean Jobs Bill, which could create 32,000 jobs**

 **3. Incentivize the use of clean energy use by factories, commercial high-rise buildings and government facilities to support the Green-Jobs manufacturing sector**

**4. Partner with Federal agencies to invest in High-Speed Rail transportation in Illinois**

**Energy:**

**Q) *Illinois has a very diverse energy portfolio and is a net exporter of energy in a deregulated marketplace. Energy is poised to be major issue in 2016 because of federal regulations and possible changes in Illinois’ energy portfolio. Nuclear energy emits zero carbon emissions at a time when the new federal rule requires Illinois to reduce carbon emissions by 44 percent. Do you support or oppose legislation backed by Exelon to create a low-carbon portfolio standard?***

**A) This is one of the most pressing challenges facing the world community and I do not believe there is a magic bullet solution to it. I would be opposed to such a bill if the trade-off for lowering carbon emissions means relying solely on nuclear energy because of the tremendous risks to communities and the environment if/when accidents occur. However, I do understand that reduced carbon standards cannot, in the short run, be met by increased renewable energy resources. Many in the climate change world are supporting nuclear as a bridge source of energy over the next 50 years in order to meet the critical carbon goals. I am open to considering nuclear energy, as part of a multi-faceted approach in addressing this problem, if we can enact the strongest possible regulations to prevent disasters.**

**Q) *Illinois’ current Renewable Portfolio Standard calls for Illinois to procure a certain percentage of renewable power by the year 2020. The state is only halfway to its goal, and there is a proposal to increase the required amount of renewable energy and extending the time period to meet that goal. Do you support or oppose increasing Illinois Renewable Portfolio Standard even if the cost of power increases slightly? Do you support or oppose the Illinois Clean Jobs bill?***

**A) Yes. I support the Illinois Clean Jobs bill.**

**Q) *Illinois has to reduce carbon emissions by 44 percent under the federal rule. Do you support creation of either a cap-and-trade program or a carbon tax to help mitigate carbon emissions in Illinois?***

**A) Yes.**

**Gun safety:**

**Q) *Do you support tighter gun background check laws? Do you support limiting straw gun purchases?***

**A) Yes**

**Q) *Do you support or oppose state licensing for all firearms dealers?***

**A) Support**

**Q) *Do you support or oppose allowing families to petition the courts to temporarily remove guns from people in crisis?***

**A) Support**

**Criminal justice:**

**Q) *Do you support or oppose legislation to promote the transparency and preservation of police disciplinary records?***

**A) Yes**

**Q) *Do you support the goal of reducing the Illinois adult prison population by 25% by 2025? Would you support sentencing reform such as reducing or eliminating prison terms for non-violent drug offenses? Would you support early release of aged and disabled prisoners predicated on an assessment of risk to public safety prior to release?***

**A) Yes.**

**Q) *Do you support automatic expungement and sealing of criminal records for all crimes after an appropriate period during which the former offender commits no crimes?***

**A) Yes.**

**Q) *Given that there are more empty beds than youth now in the juvenile prisons, do you support closing one or more juvenile prisons?***

**A) Yes. Additionally, money saved from the closing of juvenile prisons should be added to the Monetary Award Program (MAP) to address the rising cost of education.**

**Q) *What is your view on a proposal to end the placement of juveniles on the state’s sex offender registry based on assessment of their risk and likelihood to reoffend and/or benefit from treatment? For adult sex offenders, what is your view on delivery of rehabilitation therapy and limiting sex offender registry restrictions only to those men and women assessed to pose a danger to others?***

1. **I agree with the proposal to end the placement of juveniles on the state’s sex offender registry based on an assessment of their risk and likelihood to reoffend and/or benefit from treatment. For adult sex offenders, I do believe that the sex offender registry should be limited to those who are assessed to pose a danger to others, otherwise the registry becomes less accurate as a tool to protect the public.**

**Q) *Do you support a form of merit selection of judges?***

**A)Yes.**

**Other:**

**Q) *Do you support the pending constitutional amendment to create an independent commission to draw legislative districts?***

**A) Although I haven’t read the pending constitutional amendment, I do support an independent commission drawing up legislative districts.**

**Q) *What changes in workers’ compensation or tort reform do you favor?***

**A) None**

**Q) *Do you support or oppose automatic voter registration?***

**A) Support – Citizen participation is the keystone to our democracy. We must continue to encourage civic participation, particularly with young people. I see this as an easy way to accomplish our goal of civic engagement.**

**Q) *What sort of ethics and campaign-funding reforms does the state need?***

1. **I support proposals for publicly-funded elections in combination with stricter contribution limits to reduce the influence of Super PAC’s and millionaires in the electoral process.**

**Q) *2016 is going to be a big year in education, as both state and the City of Chicago wrestle with fundamental issues of funding and school policy. Who was the most important teacher in your life and why?***

1. **It is not easy to identify just one important teacher in my life because there have been so many. The opportunity I have had to receive a good education is something that has been fundamental in making me the person I am today. So many teachers have played an integral role in that process. If I had to identify just one important teacher in my life, I would perhaps single out my high school Social Studies teacher, Ms. Anne Moore, who I learned many years later was the sister of documentary filmmaker Michael Moore. She was important because she was one of the first teachers to challenge me to think critically about social issues and become more aware of politics, current events, and the experiences of those who are powerless and vulnerable in our society. She helped to set a foundation upon which to build a better-developed way to understand the world around me that still helps to guide me to this day.**