

Name: Jillian Rose Bernas

District running for: 56th Representative District

Political party: Republican

Political/civic background:

Schaumburg Township District Library Trustee

Schaumburg Township Mental Health Awareness Committee Associate Member

ESL Instructor – Church of the Holy Spirit, Schaumburg

University of Notre Dame Women’s Connect Steering Committee

Previous - Chicago Council on Global Affairs Young Professional Ambassador

Catholic Charities Junior Board

Occupation:

International Relations Manager – American Association of Neurological Surgeons

Education:

BA Spanish/Secondary Education – Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, IN

MEd Education, ESL Instruction – University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN

MPP - University of Chile, Santiago, Chile

AM Public Policy – University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Campaign website: www.votejillian.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.*

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

A) Our state is in a very precarious position given its massive state debt and crushing pension debt. This puts our state in a weak position to provide the programs and services that are necessary for our most vulnerable citizens. As any individual, family or business that has taken on debt can attest, the burden of paying down debt leaves less flexibility when designating resources to other important areas.

When individuals, families and businesses need to pay down their debt they look for efficiencies, cost savings measures and make the hard decisions to give up certain expenditures in exchange for paying down their debt. They may also seek out opportunities to increase their revenue by acquiring more advanced skills or taking on extra hours. State lawmakers can do both these things as well to balance the budget, however, they cite the need for additional revenue before even considering reforms to run our state more efficiently.

In 2011, House and Senate Democrats levied the highest tax increase in state history with the promise to pay down the backlog of bills burdening our state. This vote took \$31 billion in additional revenue from taxpayers without making a dent in the state debt. In that same time, our pension liabilities grew, our credit rating was downgraded and \$127 million was added to our debt. Democrat leadership, backed by my opponent Michelle Mussman, that encouraged this huge increase have not earned the right to again request more money from hardworking individuals, families and businesses.

There is little evidence to show that we can balance the budget by just raising taxes. Only after structural reforms have been made to our failing systems would I consider increasing taxes.

We cannot continue to pass along the cost of poor policy decisions to families and businesses like what was done in 2011 and expect better outcomes. Only by reforming our failing systems can we provide the economic growth that leads to an improved

quality of life for families, better opportunities for job seekers, and higher tax revenues for government.

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?

A) Currently, one quarter of every dollar the state takes in goes to fund pensions, compared to most states that spend 5%, and the unfunded pension liability is the largest in the nation, \$111 billion and growing. We are not going to be able to provide for the pensions by just taxing, borrowing or investing. Reforms to the pension system are a needed piece of the puzzle because if left unreformed and underfunded the pension system will consume the state budget.

While protecting benefits that have already been earned, the constitutionality of moving all current public employees to self-managed plans needs to be tested. I am behind reforms that transition government employees away from defined benefits toward a 401(k)-style plan similar to those in the private sector. This move is critical to improving state finances and puts more control in the hands of retirees instead of politicians.

It comes down to a question of fairness. I do not think it is fair to public workers to continue with a failing pension system for them to see their checks bounce and be left with nothing one day. I also do not think it is fair for a working family making an average of \$50,000 to finance lifetime benefits for government workers. I also do not believe that it is fair for retirees to be taxed on their retirement income, although my opponent has suggested she would consider this option.

Since moving to a self-managed system focuses on changing future benefits it is more likely to pass a constitutional review. In the past, courts have ruled that important state interests can justify limiting constitutional rights. Fair reforms to the pension system serve an important state interest.

Workers need to be paid what they have earned and been promised and then we need to act to let them control their own futures.

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?

A) I would support a budget that is fair to the families and workers of Illinois no matter where such budget was developed.

Unfortunately, since the state legislature is controlled by very powerful House and Senate Leaders my support or opposition of this measure would really make no difference. The Speaker's approval is needed to enact any piece of legislation into law. Every two years, the majority of House members, including my opponent, adopt House Rules giving

Madigan control over every step in the process. Over his time in office, House Rules have been changed to give him full control.

The Speaker ultimately rules through the House Rules committee. This committee is made up of his loyal leadership team. Every bill introduced has to go through the Rules committee where the decision is made to forward it to a substantive committee or hold it. A bill held in this committee will not make it out without unanimous consent of the House, which never happens.

If a bill can make it to the House floor, the Speaker decides whether or not to call a vote. If he never calls it for a vote, it dies.

Sadly, my opponent has not and cannot stand up to the Speaker since her district was drawn by the Speaker, her campaign is funded by the Speaker and her salary is augmented by the Speaker, having appointed her to head the special needs committee.

Education:

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

A) Education is an investment in our children and young people and provides a great benefit to the overall society. Families should have access to an education that is equitable, effective and strives for excellence.

Unfortunately, this is not happening in the current structure of government. We are investing in bureaucracies instead of investing in children. Reforms in funding to have education dollars follow children instead of bureaucracies allows parents and students to do what is best for the student.

Although this change will not reduce the state's investment in education right away, it will change the flow of resources and who makes the decisions on how taxpayer resources are spent on K-12 education.

As a former teacher, I can attest to the strength of parents and students to be the best advocates for themselves and the great momentum behind empowering families and students in the education process.

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?

A) Currently, the incentive structure for accountability in funding teacher pension programs perpetuates the unfunded pension liability. It is hard to have the local school districts determine pension benefits while the state government picks up the costs.

Practices like this one make any type of spending accountability impossible and place a heavy burden on Illinois families and businesses to fund a soaring pension liability.

Practices like this one need to be reworked, however, for decades Springfield politicians completely overlook structural problems. They are happy to make promises they cannot keep and then when things go wrong they want to change the rules of the game and push costs onto local school districts.

In refusing to solve the underlying problems, politicians do the communities they were elected to service a huge disservice.

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) Funding our universities is critical to the state's future and should be a legislative priority. However, under Representative Mussman and her party, the state's ability to pay its bills and balance a budget have been compromised and important services are threatened.

State universities should be a vehicle for upward mobility. Instead as a result of the mismanagement of state funds, public universities are seeing their costs rise because of problems plaguing the state. These problems include higher borrowing costs due to credit rating downgrades and the high costs of doing business in Illinois that not only effect businesses, but also public universities.

This results in the State paying more per student and the students paying more in tuition than our neighboring states. Students are paying the costs, graduating with high student debt that makes this upward mobility much more difficult.

Currently, Illinois is paying 30 % to 60 % more when our public universities are compared to similar, public universities in neighboring states.

In order to restore Illinois as a leader in higher education, we need to restore our state's fiscal solvency by making the politically difficult decisions needed to reform our state.

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) One of the most important responsibilities of government is to provide for public safety. Part of this great responsibility lies in maintaining state infrastructure. Under Representative Mussman and her party, the state infrastructure we rely on is falling apart.

Since providing for our roads, bridges and waterways is a top priority, the State should cut unnecessary spending to finance infrastructure projects. I would suggest starting by reallocating funds from projects like the \$35 million awarded to a school in Speaker Madigan's district that went beyond normal guidelines, the \$10 million in capital construction money that went to a theater in Senate President Cullerton's district, the \$250,000 for celebrating the state's birthday or the \$700,000 that put bronze doors on the Capitol building.

I want to work to better prioritize the allocation of taxpayer resources and implement reforms before considering tax increases.

Q) *Illinois' public transportation formula provides money for operating costs, but not capital costs. Should Illinois create a reliable funding stream for capital costs?*
Creating a new funding stream at this point would only add to our budgetary problems. Departments within the state need to prioritize spending and save accordingly. Procedures make clear that projects are far more likely to receive the capital project money if they have dedicated funding in the department's proposed budget. Then when a project is approved, the department can move the funds forward to complete the project. In this way money is driving projects instead of the other way around.

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.*

A) Between January 2008 and January 2010, Illinois lost 117,000 manufacturing job. Under the policies of my opponent and her party, we only gained back 18,000. That means that almost 100,000 manufacturing jobs that create a strong middle class were never recuperated.

We need to first fix our pension problem. As stated earlier, our pension problem makes it difficult for the State to pay any of its other obligations. As a result, many employers with good jobs are avoiding Illinois. A history of failed leadership in Springfield has kept Illinois in a constant state of uncertainty and business hates uncertainty. The Sun Times Editorial Board put it best when reporting on Illinois losing General Electric "Businesses don't like taxes, but they hate uncertainty".

Without solving the pension issue, we will continually be in a state of uncertainty and manufacturing along with all other business will avoid or flee our once great state.

Manufacturers are leaving our state for a more friendly business climate in neighboring states. We should make Illinois attractive to manufacturers and businesses, and lure them back by looking at what policies our neighbors are adopting that is making them so successful.

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) There is tremendous potential for our state in the energy sector considering we are a state that is rich in coal and natural gas deposits found in shale deposits. According to economists, almost all of the growth in GDP is attributed to the energy sector and this field will continue to grow. Economic growth depends on increased energy use and demand for energy is expected to increase over the coming years.

Through common-sense regulations, we can build the middle class and our economy in Illinois by growing our state's competitive advantage in this sector. Inaction will only contribute to future energy shortages and a further depressed economic situation. The energy sector will be crucial in reestablishing long-term growth in Illinois through abundant, reliable and relatively inexpensive fuels.

By reconsidering proposed regulations and taxes and building off of good energy policy, we can take the first steps in energy security and independence. If only the current leadership would take the necessary steps to encourage an energy renaissance, we would be in a win-win-win situation for the economy, for the public and for state coffers.

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) Families and businesses in the state of Illinois are hurting because of bad policy choices by Illinois Democrats and now my opponent and her party want to impose

another mandate on the people to send their hard earned money to special interest groups like Exelon and ComEd that fund their campaigns.

The Renewable Portfolio Standard requires that 25 percent of our state's power be met by clean sources in the year 2025. However, because of the way the act was structured the Illinois Power Agency charged with negotiating electricity purchases for utility customers has not been able to contract with new renewable power providers.

Since utility customers have moved to other providers other than ComEd, the IPA is having a harder time negotiating for the remaining utility customers. This, along with other problems with the law, have made it impossible for them to negotiate long-term contracts with providers of renewable energy.

The right policy decision would have been to have nonutility providers pay more into the IPA and establish a reliable revenue source in order to contract with renewable projects.

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) Many cap-and-trade program advocates believe that it is impossible to tax carbon. They would find it especially difficult for an agency like the IRS to create a simple tax on carbon.

However, if we want to benefit from the positive externalities of discouraging dirty energy consumption and encouraging investments in alternative energies a straight carbon tax should be looked at if we can assure our taxes do not increase. It would be ideal if we could shift that tax burden from labor to consumption, exchanging the income tax for a carbon tax, similar to the proposal of a legislator in South Carolina.

Again I would not be in favor of cap-and-trade programs or carbon taxes as an additional tax without looking at common sense ways to encourage positive behaviors without further dragging down the economy, similar to the clever policy solution suggested above.

Gun safety:

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

A) There are already various gun-control laws on the books and they are not being enforced. It seems like lawmakers are misguided in thinking that by creating more gun-control laws there would be more enforcement. The State of Illinois already has some of the strictest gun-control laws in the nation.

Criminals only have a few ways to acquire guns, either by buying them at a gun show or online. Different laws can be created for these different options, but a criminal is going to find a way to access weapons either through straw purchasers, the black market or by stealing them.

Unlike my opponent, I believe that law-abiding citizens have the right to arm themselves. Gun-control laws created to limit criminals from accessing guns will only limit law-abiding citizens from accessing guns as criminals continue to obtain them anyway. Instead of imposing more rules on law-abiding citizens, there should be more consequences imposed on criminals, such as increasing the penalties for those who illegally sell and purchase guns.

Preventing gun violence is complex and there is no easy fix. Politicians have a knee jerk response to gun violence by calling for more laws with no plan to enforce them. More focus should be on enforcing current laws and improving the state's fiscal situation to provide better mental health advocacy, education and standards of living.

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

A) We do not have a balanced state budget. Currently, there is a licensing procedure through the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives at the federal government level. Creating another licensing procedure at the state level would require adding another line item to the state's unbalanced budget and additional costs for businesses and law-abiding citizens.

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

A) I would have to weigh the costs and benefits of implementing such a program. Taking responsible steps to prevent someone who is mentally ill or in a crisis situation is important. The time piece would be very important for this to be successful as delay could make the Extreme Risk Protection Order ineffective.

Criminal justice:

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

A) Steps need to be taken to promote more transparency and prevent corruption and cover-up from happening across the board and change needs to start at the top. Most recently the high profile case of Laquan McDonald was stalled by bureaucrats as to not interfere with Mayor Emmanuel's reelection efforts. Leaders in our state need to put the families they are representing above their political ambitions.

This is why I have supported bipartisan legislation sponsored by La Shawn Ford HB 4356 to provide the citizens of Chicago the ability to hold Mayor Emmanuel accountable for this cover-up within his administration. Although my opponent claims she is for recalling any elected official, she has stayed silent on this piece of legislation. She unfortunately is preferring her political ambitions over the welfare of the citizens of our state.

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) The State needs criminal-justice reforms to create a system that is fairer and more cost-effective with an emphasis on rehabilitation and recovery instead of just punishment and incarceration.

Some of the policies forming part of a rehabilitation-recovery system should focus on rolling back overcriminalization by reducing laws that criminalize victimless activities and overcrowd prisons, and better supporting re-entry into society by removing state barriers to ex-offenders, like licensing rules, which make it hard for them to find employment.

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) Many variables would need to be considered before supporting or opposing measures to expunge and seal criminal records. For example, the nature of the crimes eligible for expungement, the length of time that has passed since the offense, the current contributions of the individual to society and the cost of the implementation of this program.

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) Since the juvenile justice system is not facing overcrowding like the adult justice system it would make sense to close the unneeded facilities. Not only is there a fiscal argument for this, but also a rehabilitation argument for this.

Various juvenile justice centers cost well over \$100,000 per inmate and some up to \$200,000, and the Department of Juvenile Justice stands to save millions by closing certain facilities. Also, there is little evidence to support that juvenile justice centers are the best place for juveniles. After all, there is a 48% recidivism rate. Improving access to educational and vocational opportunities for young people to incentivize positive habits could keep them away from crime.

The juvenile justice system has recognized that juvenile offenders after incarceration often pose a greater threat to society because juvenile justice centers lack appropriate mental-health, substance-abuse and educational programs. Incarceration should be one of many tools that the justice system uses and only when there are no other viable alternative. Evidence-based policies should be considered to help safely reduce the prison population especially among young offenders, giving them the opportunity to get their lives back on track.

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?

A) First of all, I want to be clear that all sex crimes no matter the age are awful. Although individuals should not be stigmatized for something they did as a child, ensuring that the individual is fully rehabilitated would be my utmost concern. As for adult sex offenders, the government has a responsibility to provide for public safety and reconsidering the consequences for sex crimes committed as an adult would be an unconscionable thing to do.

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

A) In Illinois, election positions are manipulated by special interest groups and the ruling political elite. I do not believe that selecting judges on merit would actually change anything about the status quo and it would most likely not take politics out of the judicial selection process. If anything, it would take even more power away from the people

Other:

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

A) The independent map initiative is a good government initiative that will take the job of drawing maps away from politicians and give it to the people.

Right now the most important criteria for drawing maps is the voting history of constituents and the address of the incumbent. Under the amendment, a panel of 11 members would respect the social, racial and geographic boundaries of the community instead of placing voters into predictable Republican and Democrat districts.

The district maps as currently drawn have been worked to guarantee a certain outcome in most districts, which means many seats go uncontested and the voters do not have a choice. I believe that competitive elections produce more responsive candidates because these community leaders need to earn your vote and are less likely to take it for granted.

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

A) My opponent says she is a "Mom on a Mission". I often question what kind of mission she is on. People have fled the State of Illinois under her leadership in search of better job opportunities and lower tax burdens. Right now our state has the lowest employment rate in the Midwest and did not recover from the Great Recession nearly as well as our neighbors. Our property taxes are the second highest in the nation.

We need to reform the policies that prevent businesses and, thus, families from staying or relocating to Illinois. Responsible worker's compensation reforms that maintain important benefits for workers that are hurt on the job while taking unnecessary pressures off of local governments, non-profits and businesses are important. Employers should only be responsible for injuries that occur due to worker's employment not injuries that occur offsite, outside the work day. Another important reform would be to discourage doctor shopping by injured workers in search of a sympathetic doctor. This would help local governments, non-profits and businesses alike provide for employees injured on the job while also being able to keep their doors open and employ the many other individuals working for them.

Another ranking to look at is that of Illinois' tort climate which is ranked the fourth worst in the nation. The tort system in the state places undue burden on the people of Illinois. It results in higher costs for things and lower wages for people. It also negatively effects production of goods and services, decreases returns on all kinds of investments and limits access to healthcare. Comprehensive tort reform is needed and the legislation regulating monetary tort losses and litigation risks need to be reevaluated.

Q) Do you support or oppose automatic voter registration?

A) The current bill proposed by Senator Manar does little to alleviate concerns about cost, efficiency and voter fraud. Data does not show Illinois has or has had a problem in registering voters. However, it does have a problem with voter turnout. This is likely based on years of the same failed policies from the same failed leadership in Springfield.

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

A) There have been many attempts at campaign-funding reforms, but very little progress in changing how state politicians operate. Reforms that would actually have an effect and keep leaders accountable to their constituents would be independent mapping, recall elections and term limits.

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?

A) I used to be a competitive ice skater and was coming off of a week of competition out of state. I was in 8th grade at Robert Frost Junior High School in Schaumburg and loved Spanish class. That first day back I had to present my final project in Mr. Arizpe's Spanish class, which was the culmination of many weeks of work. I did a miserable job because I was not fully prepared. I mustered the courage to ask the very firm Mr. Arizpe for another shot the following day and surprisingly he gave me another opportunity. I got a 100%.

This moment was very instructive for me as later I myself became a middle school Spanish teacher. Every time a student genuinely asked for another opportunity, I tried to remember my 8th grade self, how I felt asking for a second chance and the fulfillment of working to improve myself and deliver an outstanding performance. I thought Mr. Arizpe was a very fair teacher and enjoyed his Spanish classes very much.

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