Name: Omar Aquino  
  
District running for: State Senate, 2nd Legislative District  
  
Political party: ­­ Democrat  
  
Political/civic background:  
  
- Worked with U.S. Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth on unemployment, minimum wage, immigration, education, senior advocacy, economic development, and veteran issue as Outreach Coordinator  
- Bilingual Case Manager for senior adults on Chicago’s west side  
- Loyola University Diversity Councilman  
- Empowerment Pipeline Education Program Co-Founder  
- Fluent in English and Spanish  
  
Occupation: Property manager  
  
Education: BA/BS in Sociology and Criminal Justice  
Loyola University, 2012   
  
Campaign website: [aquinoforsenate.com](http://aquinoforsenate.com/" \t "_blank)  
  
  
  
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) N/A  
  
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) No.  
  
  
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) Yes.  
  
  
Education:  
  
Q) What, if anything, should we do to change how we fund schools?  
  
A) I support proposals such as using the City of Chicago’s 1.4 billion TIF to fund CPS instead of giving out corporate handouts.  
  
  
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) Yes to both because it’s unfair that Chicago is paying more than any other school district in the state while it receives the same pension funding as the rest of the districts.  
  
  
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) Significant increase in state funding for higher education. My plan would be to reach across the aisle and work with private sector corporations to secure additional opportunities for public higher education.  
  
  
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) No. There can be other streams of revenue that should be used before imposing a new or addition tax.   
  
  
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.  
  
A) 1.) Support funding for programs for technical and trade jobs.  
2.) Funding for infrastructure repair.  
3.) Changing our corporate tax structure to lure in new corporations.  
  
  
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) Support  
  
  
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, the long term outcome will end up benefiting us in the end. Yes, I do 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) I support a cap-and-trade program.  
  
  
Gun safety:  
  
Q) Do you support tighter gun background check laws? Do you support limiting straw gun purchases?  
  
A) Yes to both.  
  
  
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) No.  
  
  
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. Juveniles benefit much more from counseling than from long or short term detention. We need to stop jailing and failing our kids.  
  
  
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) I am in support of any proposal or legislation that protects children from sexual predators. I would also support any proposal or legislation that protects victim groups.  
  
Q) Do you support a form of merit selection of judges?   
  
A) No. We need voter to be able to elected qualified judges that represent a judiciary that is reflective of their individual communities.   
  
  
Other:  
  
Q) Do you support the pending constitutional amendment to create an independent commission to draw legislative districts?   
  
Yes, I support a constitutional amendment to create an independent commission to draw legislative maps. It is crucial in keeping minority representation in the General Assembly.   
  
  
Q) What changes in workers’ compensation or tort reform do you favor?   
  
A) Any changes in workers’ compensation right now are part of Governor Rauner’s turn around agenda.   
  
  
Q) Do you support or oppose automatic voter registration?  
  
A) Support.  
  
  
Q) What sort of ethics and campaign-funding reforms does the state need?  
  
A) Tougher and more stringent regulations on lobbying registration and pay-to-play politics.  
  
  
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) My parents. They taught me if you work hard, you are given opportunities. They taught me to always invest in myself. Their tireless work ethic has given me the structure and fortitude to never exhaust in our mission to make our communities a better place to live, grow, and flourish as people.