**Full Name:** Jac Charlier

**District running for:** 15th State Representative in General Assembly

**Political party:** Democratic

**Political/civic background:** 25 years of civic engagement through creating and leading citizen-led initiatives to build community; state-level policy advocacy; campaign volunteer

**Occupation:** Businessman (Business Development), Consultant, Trainer, Adjunct Professor (Criminal Justice)

**Education:** The Ohio State University, John Glenn School of Public Policy, Master’s Degree in Public Administration (MPA), Criminal Justice Thesis; University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign, Bachelor of Science (BS), Mathematics

**Campaign website:** www.citizensforjac.org

**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) The answer to this question must begin with understanding three statements. 1) Illinois is broke. 2) Illinois has a disappointing and long history of corruption. 3) Illinois is broke because it is corrupt. And, the Chicago Machine is the prime source of our corruption and hence the prime cause of our fiscal disaster. Chicago Machine politicians are the “face” of the Chicago Machine.

Our state budget is a statement of our priorities. I’m running to fix Illinois and restoring our state’s fiscal health is my number one priority. It is no understatement that our very future depends on whether or not we can get our state into the black and keep it there. Working with elected officials of any political party, this will be my focus upon election.

For years, incumbents like my opponent, Chicago Machine politician John D’Amico, have kicked the fiscal can down the road to avoid making the tough decisions that could have jeopardized their chances for re-election. Instead, they preferred to simply vote like they were told to by party bosses and taking absolutely no leadership on their own. The result is pretty clear: the State is $135 billion in the red and we are at a budget impasse 7 months after the state budget was due. We could have avoided coming down this path if long-time, career incumbents like D’Amico were better stewards of our hard earned tax dollars, but they weren’t and so we’re here.

Whatever the ultimate package of solutions, it is pretty clear that the legislators like John D’Amico, who created this fiscal disaster, are not the ones who can be counted on to get us out of it. In fact, incumbents of both political parties who have caused so much hurt across the state must be voted out in 2016. If they are deemed by the Democratic or Republican Party to be “too big to fail”, then we will as a State indeed fail.

It is also pretty clear that increased revenues will have to be part of the solution to what I term a “new and better future.” However, I want to minimize the effect of any revenue increases on ordinary families and workers so they, and all of us, pay the least amount of taxes possible for the right amount of government. This is an important starting principle for me because being in a state that’s broke costs us real money right out of our paychecks, purses and pocket books, and hurts our neighbors in deep and real need who rely on essential state services.

My preferred source for increased revenue is returning the corporate income tax to the pre-January 2015 level and making it permanent. The drop in revenue for the State from lowering this tax has been devastating. We should also take a close look at corporate income tax credits and loopholes. Combined with this, I also see the need for sales taxes on services to be expanded to reflect our modern, service-sector economy. Most of these service sales taxes are business-to-business. Many states already have this modern revenue structure in place but Illinois lags behind in this area too as our tax policy is primarily based on the 1960’s economy: mining and manufacturing. Ask yourself, when was the last time you heard of a major new mine opening up?

I would support a statewide constitutional amendment voted on by the citizens to establish a progressive income tax.

These three reforms can go a long way to making our budget crisis solvable, if only rank and file legislators would be leaders and demand a vote on these proposals. Specifically, D’Amico hasn’t and so I’ve stepped up to lead. This is always the role of the citizen and is especially true in 2016.

Note that in any conversation about the budget, our social services must not be cut further and indeed must be restored. Since 2008, D’Amico and others have participated in so underfunding these vital services that the services are on the verge of collapse. He supported essentially stealing funds that should have gone to those most in need that instead were used to pay the state’s operational expenses. It’s not the American way to treat our neighbors this way and worse, it shows an inability to correctly manage the state’s finances.

Finally, we need to address wasteful and unnecessary government programs by cutting them. Programs must show they can achieve expected outcomes. The public deserves the very best services for their hard earned tax dollars. Adding performance measures to both internal State operational spending and contracted services is a must. This is a budget solution too, albeit a small piece of it. In addition, performance indicators must be readily made available to citizens via online dashboards so we can easily monitor how programs are doing and how tax dollars are being spent. Transparency is always a great thing in a democracy.

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) The Supreme Court has made clear that the only avenue left for pension reform is cutting pensions for new hires even further. That may be a problem as well, because so many state employees are exempt from Social Security. Federal law is also clear that state and local governments who decide not to participate in Social Security have to provide a minimum pension benefit. Any further substantial cut in pensions for new employees may very well violate federal law, so doing that is not good policy. So while I am open to a yet-to-be-developed pension tier for new employees only (not any existing employees), it would have to be done carefully to ensure it does not end up in court and adding even more costs due to poorly constructed legislation.

Most Illinois residents have no employer funded pensions and I am ever mindful of this fact. Public sector workers do vital jobs and yet these jobs must not be the envy of non-public sector workers. Public service is just that, service to the public for a fair wage. I’m also mindful of the Chicago Machine’s use of public patronage – this I also keep in mind so pensions do not become synonymous with “political reward”.

I support existing worker pensions at the state, county and city level 100%. The workers did their parts. It was legislators like D’Amico who failed in doing their part. In fact, D’Amico voted to cut worker pensions even though he knew the vote was unconstitutional. He did as he was told by party bosses. That’s especially troubling as he himself is accumulating two government pensions (City of Chicago Water Department, State) as he currently collects two government paychecks every month! This, while working part-time as a legislator is totally unacceptable.

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) Absolutely. I think a big cause of our current crisis is that Chicago Machine politicians like D’Amico didn’t challenge their entrenched leadership to pass responsible budgets. These career politicians benefit from the status quo and love being re-elected year after year so they remain quiet, silent and never step out of line.

The only way I see to go ahead is for a new cadre of rank and file legislators to be elected in 2016 and forge across the aisle, down the aisle, up the aisle and anywhere else there is an aisle, a passable, bipartisan solution that is presented to the public for the sake of integrity. People want this ongoing fiscal disaster to end now and expect elected officials to just do their jobs (apparently, a tall order indeed as they can’t even remain in Springfield to do the work instead preferring to return to their districts to campaign while still collecting their legislative paychecks.) The cost of the status quo in Springfield, while minimal for career politicians like D’Amico, is simply too high for working families across this state who are losing their jobs and for our neighbors who are hurting badly. It’s a shameful disgrace. Period.

**Education:**

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

A) The education of our youngest citizens is a concern for all of us. If we are to be serious about that we need to make a real commitment to education in Illinois across the state. So far, we do not make K-12 education a priority as reflected in the funding levels for these grades. We are willing to pay to incarcerate each other’s children but not to educate them. We are willing to pay to build each other’s roads (as it should be) but not to pay for our children to have a better road to travel down. This situation just doesn’t make sense to me. As a result, I support a single, statewide school funding mechanism that provides for every student and teacher (pay and pension) alike.

In addition, school finance in Illinois is made unduly complicated and unfair because of our over-reliance on the property tax for schools. Children in poor communities do not deserve a poor education. This has become nothing more than an economic version of “separate but unequal”. Of course, like many things at the State level, we cannot really substantially address equitable education funding until our budget is back on track and we are paying down the State’s debt.

Currently, we base school funding formulas on political expediency rather than documented best practices and known costs. The foundation level of funding is essentially a fabricated number rather than an estimate that reflects the actual level of funding needed to educate our children. Too much emphasis is placed on pitting districts against each other rather than the education of our children. Instead of asking whether suburbs should pay more or whether Chicago gets too much, we should be asking what our children need to gain the knowledge and skills that will allow them to be good citizens and succeed in life. Again, the education of our children belongs to all of us and we must all pay for it or, as we see reflected in our criminal justice and public welfare systems, we all pay for it in other, more expensive ways.

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) Both of my parents were teachers, and I believe that educators who have dedicated their lives to helping the next generation learn and become successful deserve our support for a secure retirement. This is especially true because teachers do not participate in Social Security and they do not have that level of income security in their old age.

The question of how much the State should contribute to fund teachers’ pensions can only be addressed within the context of broader education funding reform and getting our state budget back in the black. The specific challenge here is that different school districts have negotiated different pension pay-in rates and salary rates for teachers. This adds a layer of complexity to the solution. Nevertheless, I believe we are all responsible for building a world-class education system across the entire state. As stated then, I support a single, statewide school funding mechanism that provides for every student and teacher (pay, pension) alike.

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) I am a proud graduate of one of our State’s wonderful universities – U of I at Urbana/Champaign (UIUC). The education I received there, as a military veteran through the Army GI Bill, allowed me to advance myself and go on to even earn a master’s degree. So I know that higher education is an important State asset, both for economic and for human development, and I support public higher education.

However, I recognize we are in a very tight budget situation. I wish I could promise that I would vote to increase higher education funding right away. The reality is that until the budget crisis is under control, it is irresponsible to make this commitment. Telling the truth as a candidate means just that, tell the truth that everything can’t be done when you are bankrupt. Remember, it was career politicians like D’Amico that bankrupted the state. We didn’t do it to each other. While D’Amico must be held accountable by being voted out on Election Day, sadly we will have to pay for his fiscal mismanagement for a long time. As he will collect two government pensions ($125K/year) paid for by us, he will be very well cared for regardless.

Right now, elementary and secondary education funding is a higher priority to me than higher education because education, especially early education, provides the basis for everyone’s future success, whether they go straight to work, trade school, college or graduate school. When resources are finally available, and I see this as a first priority once they are, we should fund higher education at an increased level to make it part of the path for as many citizens as possible.

**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) The first thing to do is to make sure that we have a capital budget that is just for capital projects. We have used long term debt to finance our short term obligations, and we have to stop that practice. Like other fiscal mismanagement D’Amico supported, this only digs us deeper into debt.

I believe that if we are more disciplined about what justifies a bond issue, we can have a capital plan that addresses our infrastructure needs without the necessity of multiple new taxes and fees. However, as roads need ongoing and regular maintenance, I support using a gas tax and user fees to fund road projects, and user fees to fund other transportation infrastructure. I am not convinced that we need a substantial increase in fees for capital projects if we tame our general revenue budget.

I am a strong supporter of public transit especially passenger rail. I am also a strong supporter of bike transportation.

I want to invest infrastructure dollars in our local, neighborhood downtowns. We deserve to have infrastructure investment that supports neighborhood solutions too and that help to build community.

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

A) I believe that we need a real capital budget in Illinois that funds only capital improvements, many focused on our local, neighborhood downtowns. This also includes public transportation and public rail. To be honest, given our past record of using capital funding and bonds to pay for operating costs, I am concerned that a separate funding stream for capital projects, especially if it involves a new fee or tax, would be manipulated to increase the operating budget rather than be used for purely capital projects. If you need an example, look at the Illinois Lottery which was supposed to be an education funding increase, but instead has been used as a shell game to decrease general revenue funding of education and replace it with Lottery proceeds resulting in no net gain to education.

While I support an investment in infrastructure as part of our new and better future, the real reform needed prior to this is to elect legislators committed to an honest, transparent budget, and one that is balanced as required by the Illinois Constitution (without tricks to hold pension payments out of the budget accounting).

**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) It’s a pretty simple economic problem: if we want to attract high paying jobs, Illinois has to be a place where goods manufactured here have higher added value than goods manufactured in other places. Illinois, even with a highly productive work force, will never compete with low wage countries such as China in producing low cost, low added value goods. Nor should we for we would undervalue our workers and undermine our own economy. We can do better than this.

In other words, Illinois should be the kind of state where a worker paid $40/hr can produce $80 of value. Instead, we seem to be adopting policies that simply lower labor costs without increasing value – a place where a worker paid $10/hr produces $12 of value. Smart businesses would flock to the state with higher added value, and that’s where we should compete.

To become a state where we add the most value, we need to invest first and foremost in education. We start with general education, but we also have to look at adult education and worker training. Smart, knowledgeable workers will always be in demand, and we have to be the state that produces them.

Second, we have to be a state that provides the infrastructure for innovation and efficiency. That means investment in transportation and communications infrastructure (especially for a fast-paced, wireless, global economy). It also means making sure our universities, particularly our public universities, are true research institutions leading the country with innovation.

Third, we have to be the kind of place that attracts talent and business. For all the talk of tax incentives to large manufacturing companies, the single biggest factor in deciding where to locate a manufacturing facility is a great workforce so employers do not have to deal with high turnover rates. An attractive quality of life for our citizens is not just a desirable goal in itself it is an economic development tool too.

Beyond just manufacturing jobs (our Illinois economy is 72% a service sector economy), in my experience as a businessman three elements are most important to create jobs of any kind, manufacturing and non-manufacturing alike. First, we need a great workforce. The State’s role in developing a great workforce is by having a first rate, equitable education system starting with our youngest citizens.

Second, businesses are far more sensitive to property taxes than income or other taxes. We rely too much on property taxes in Illinois, and I support efforts to shift the burden away from property taxes to other sources of revenue.

Third, businesses want a stable political and economic environment. On this last point, we fail abjectly. We are entering the seventh month of the fiscal year without a budget. No one knows what the tax burden will be for 2016, and during much of 2015 businesses did not know what the tax rate would be either. A lot of this is the fault of rank and file legislators like D’Amico who are simply there to vote as they are told by party bosses rather than to lead, to forge consensus and to honestly address our problems. For him, the legislature is just a second paycheck on top of his Chicago Water Department paycheck. The only job he created over the years was a second one for himself.

While on the subject of jobs, although not necessarily manufacturing jobs, I think it’s important that we remember that small businesses based in the community are often the easiest to help grow. I support initiatives that provide tax incentives and infrastructure improvements to community and neighborhood downtowns, like in the 15th District in Edgebrook, on Lawrence Avenue (between Mayfair and North Mayfair), in Niles and Morton Grove for example. Just a small investment in these local downtowns can be the difference between daily survival and growth for a family-owned business that employ people locally, often our very own neighbors!

As a state representative, I look forward to working with local Chambers’ of Commerce and on legislation that helps develop our neighborhood downtowns and the small businesses that will thrive there. I serve on the Board of the Edgebrook Chamber of Commerce and I am also a member of our Every Day Edgebrook, our local merchants’ association (a combination of businesses and citizens). They will have my full support to thrive as they make our local downtowns thrive!

**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) I believe that global warming is occurring. Sadly, I have to lead with that as the debate about the veracity of global warming continues on. The warming of our planet is an urgent problem on a magnitude and complexity we have never had to deal with before. As such, I strongly support the goal of reducing carbon emissions and doing it with a sense of urgency. However, I am always suspect of legislation proposed by industry players, especially large actors like Exelon, and would need to hear the testimony and read independent analysis of the legislation before supporting it.

The issue is that in highly complex industries like electricity generation, too often legislators simply rely on the contribution they receive from a company like Exelon rather than independent analysis. For example, I imagine it would be hard for my opponent to overlook the $2,000 donation he received from Commonwealth Edison on December 31, 2015, when he is deciding how to vote on this legislation. Big companies can make big campaign donations and those can have a way-too-big influence on those who love being re-elected more than they love serving the people.

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) While growing up on Chicago’s Northwest side, I participated in the Boy Scouts and earned my Eagle Scout badge. I am also proud that while in Scouting I earned the World Environmental Badge. I am a strong environmentalist and I support the proposal to increase the Illinois Renewable Portfolio Standard because the long run requires that we invest in more renewable energy. I also support the Illinois Clean Jobs bill. As we see the effects of global climate change increase, there is no doubt that clean energy jobs will be in demand, and Illinois should be in the forefront.

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 have to see evidence that cap and trade actually works to reduce carbon emissions. A carbon tax is a polluter’s tax and can be borne with only economic costs for the business while the citizenry bears the health costs. I would rather see our efforts be directed towards increasing the availability and use of renewable sources of energy, possibly funded in the interim by a carbon tax.

**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) I support state licensing for all firearms dealers.

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

A) I support allowing families to petition the courts to temporarily remove guns from people in crisis.

**Criminal justice:**

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

A) I support legislation that promotes transparency and preservation of police disciplinary records. Our government belongs to the people first and second and third. This is true in every case, not just law enforcement, I believe that greater transparency in government leads to more trust between citizens and their government, as well as better outcomes for all. All public employees serve the citizenry first.

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) I do not think that we should be setting numeric goals for reducing the prison population. That seems to me just as bad as setting numeric goals for number of arrests or convictions. Public safety must come first. That’s what citizens expect. I think reaching a numeric goal – it may be less than 25%, it may be more than 25% -- follows making wise decisions about who gets released based on evidence-based tools used to determine a person’s risk level and treatment needs.

In general, I support reducing or eliminating prison terms for non-violent drug possession offenses, again using evidence-based tools to determine to whom it should apply and then ensuring we provide the necessary drug treatment and mental health services as well as other supports for those who receive reduced prison terms.

On a case-by-case basis only and using evidence-based tools to determine a person’s risk and their treatment needs, early release of aged and disabled prisoners is possible where such a release makes sense and justice has been served.

I’ve worked in the criminal justice field for over twenty years. In looking at these issues, the primary goal is always public safety and to make our neighborhoods safer. This will be my guiding factor in voting on legislation: Does it work to make sure that my neighbors can feel safe and secure in their community? We know, of course, that public safety is greatly improved when we provide enough drug treatment and other necessary services and resources to assist a person re-entering into society in order to have them stop their criminal activity. Even better, when we invest in preventive services first, we will then avoid having the criminal justice system become the place (incorrectly) that people go for their health care, drug treatment and education. This is un-American as a way to treat our fellow citizens.

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) For certain non-violent offenses, I believe that criminal records should be sealed for most purposes after the sentence and any post-sentencing requirements are fulfilled. Once a person has completed their sentence including any community portion of the sentence, they must be allowed to move on without paying for their actions over and over. This is especially true for communities of color that are disproportionately over-represented in our criminal justice system. The poor also suffer greatly in this regard as they seek employment in an already very fragile economic world.

Sealing of records would not apply to criminal justice agencies that need access to such information.

I believe expungement should be decided on a case-by-case basis. For juvenile records however, I support automatic expungement for non-violent crimes. For certain cases where survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking have themselves (the victims, not the perpretators) been caught up in resulting criminal activity, I also support expungement.

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) I believe in a right-sized juvenile justice system. In a time of tight budgets, we should be looking into savings and efficiencies that result from addressing underutilization. If that means closing a facility, so be it. Consideration must also be given to where facilities are located so families of those incarcerated can most easily and readily visit their children. This might mean keeping certain facilities open to accommodate a state as geographically large as Illinois.

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) The emphasis should not be limited to the crime charged, but also on the clinical, evidence-based evaluation of a person as a sex offender. In other words, there are cases where a person is clinically determined to be a sex offender, but the charged offense was something other than a sex offense. The reverse is also sometimes true, although less often. Nevertheless, the touchstone should be a clinical evaluation of someone as a sex offender. In those cases, it is well established that interventions applied together including rehabilitation therapy, close supervision and sex offender registries work best to best protect the public.

Much less is known about juvenile sex offenders, and so I would proceed cautiously when it comes to juveniles, always focused first on public safety with an eye towards how ensure certain juveniles are able to safely integrate into society. Until there is better consensus on what interventions work to help juvenile sex offenders rehabilitate, I would again use evidence-based tools to determine risk and then proceed from there. That might mean use of a registry and in other cases, no registry.

While on the topic on juveniles, keep in mind that they are also particularly vulnerable to being victimized themselves and so we must be aware of how placement of juveniles in adult facilities can impact a person’s rehabilitation. Our kids are still our kids. Second chances and beyond are American!

Finally, before leaving the criminal justice section and while on the topic of sex offenders, we must come to grips with the truth that we do a very poor job of caring for and supporting crime victims. I support the expansion of services and support for all crime victims, and especially those who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking, as well as for our youngest citizens. We just do not do right by crime victims.

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

A) At this point, I am undecided. It depends on the form of merit selection. I would much rather see reforms in how we elect judges, for example public financing of judicial elections so that political parties and special interests are not dictating judicial outcomes. The question in merit appointments is always, who does the selection? If the merit selection committee ends up consisting of the same people who make slating decisions for the Cook County Central Democratic Committee, I am not certain we have truly reformed anything.

While election of judges especially when the Chicago Machine is involved is troubling, at least the citizens have a chance to have a say. Possible non-partisan election of judges, like is done with Chicago Alderman, is a path forward.

**Other:**

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

A) Yes. We must end gerrymandering and I worked on the previous petition drive to do just that. Politicians must no longer be allowed to pick the voters before the voters ever have a chance to pick the politicians. Gerrymandering has so reduced competition in Illinois that in 2016 we will hit a new (and sad) record low of only 30% contested State elections. This must be reversed and fast. Our democracy belongs to us, it’s ours, not the political parties.

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

A) The problem with workers’ compensation is that the high premiums in Illinois are hurting businesses. No one is seriously suggesting that if premiums were low we should reduce compensation to people hurt on the job just for the sake of reducing the compensation. So any further reforms must be focused on premiums.

The effects of the last round of reforms of workers’ compensation are just now being seen. One thing we do know is that the reforms seem to have less effect on workers’ compensation insurance premiums than expected. I would support and concentrate on further changes that will in fact reduce premiums. If businesses think this is a factor in locating or staying in Illinois, then there will be fewer jobs for our citizens to have in the first place.

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

A) Yes. Voting is a right of AND duty for all citizens. Registration must be automatic and easy and simple. I strongly oppose efforts to limit voter registration and access to voting. Why make hard or difficult something we want people to do? That doesn’t make sense.

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

A) I am a firm believer that government belongs to the people, not the political parties and special interests. The best reform is for citizens to be involved on the local level in meeting, voting for, and supporting candidates for local office. I will not only vote for legislation that encourages more citizen involvement, I will personally work to increase citizen participation in my district through community forums, voter registration activities and welcoming all into the political process. I have a 25 year record of civic engagement and even running for elected office is just another part of this seamless thread in my life. This will continue on unabated.

Our democracy belongs to all citizens, not the political elite or for those who, like my opponent, enter into political office from political families and by political birthright. This must also stop and the Chicago Machine must be made a footnote in the history books.

I support legislative redistricting reform and term limits, including terms limits for legislative leaders. I have stated that I will term limit myself to five terms as a State Representative. I support contribution caps, and increased transparency in campaign finance so that it’s easy to know who gets what from whom.

I believe only individuals should be able to make campaign donations (no institutional donations of any kind should be allowed) and that they must be fully transparent and reported by campaigns and candidates alike.

I support public financing of election campaigns for judicial office. Judges must not be controlled by political parties nor ruled by campaign donations.

I favor stronger disclosure of public officials’ economic interests and also their family ties including historical lineage if it included elected officials. The Chicago Machine wants silence and secrecy to reign. This must be blunted at all turns.

I oppose double dipping (i.e., having more than one public paycheck as my opponent John D’Amico currently does, as well as him accumulating two public pensions from these two public paychecks).

I pledge to be a full time legislator if elected. My opponent works only part-time as a legislator and is rarely seen or heard from. While apparently a useful political tactic (along with a smile, handshake and severely outdated photo), it does not serve the citizenry nor our democracy well.

The contrast between my beliefs on the issue of transparency and ethics and my opponent’s record could not be clearer. My opponent personally cashes in two paychecks from government jobs that total $183,000. He does neither job full time. Moreover, my opponent is part of the last 52 year Chicago Machine patronage family-controlled political dynasty on the Northwest Side of Chicago. Over three generations, my opponent and his family has seen criminal investigations and convictions, allegation of and even convictions for ghost payrolling, voter fraud, double dipping, and a general disregard for the public interest over the interest of keeping members of the family employed by various government entities. Remember, this is just one political family.

And yet the actual legislative accomplishments of my opponent are rather meager. The best that can be said is that he will vote the way he is told by party bosses. As he is rarely seen or heard from, he couldn’t really know what’s going on in the District anyway. The residents of the 15th District deserve way better than this. It deserves a representative who will actually represent the people (hence the title – “State Representative”), and be a loud, proud and vocal advocate for all the citizens in both the city and suburbs.

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) The most important teachers in my life were my mother and father, both of whom were educators. My two Scoutmasters also had a huge influence on my development from a youth to a man, and still loom large in me today. Finally, as an adopted child who came out of foster care, my upbringing was hugely influenced by numerous adults in the Salvation Army. They are some of the kindest, most sacrificing people I know and their motto “Heart to God and Hand to Men” still resonates with me today for I experienced it on many yesterdays.

All of these adults taught me much, some through traditional educational methods and others through experiential learning and mentoring. We are best when we are surrounded by many who have the desire to see us become what we can truly be. In fact, the world needs us to be just that, no more, no less. I am grateful each and every day of my life. We must wake with an attitude of gratitude as another day means another chance to serve others especially the poor, the hungry, the homeless and the outcast, another chance to create good where none existed, and another chance to build community for it is there that we find each other and our democracy.

Finally, I thank you for taking the time to consider my submission. I ask for your endorsement of our campaign to Fix Illinois. I look forward to meeting with each of you.