**Name:** Jay Travis

**District running for:** 26th District

**Political party:** Democrat

**Political/civic background:** I have worked as a non-profit professional for over 20 years, most recently as national coordinator of the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a national community labor alliance that works for equitable public education. Before that, I worked as a program officer for the Wood Foundation, and before that for 12 years as the executive director of KOCO -- the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization -- and as a program coordinator and organizer for the American Friends Service Committee. I currently work as a consultant for the Midwest Academy, with a focus on coaching and training organizers and grassroots activists. I’ve run once before for political office, for 26th District State Representative in 2014.

**Occupation:** consultant

**Education:** BA, Columbia College, Chicago, 1994. MA, University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, 2002.

**Campaign website:** www.jayfor26.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) I opposed allowing the state income tax rollback until and unless other more progressive forms of revenue were identified to fund education -- including higher education in Illinois -- and vital social services for the state’s most vulnerable residents. I support raising corporate taxes, closing corporate loopholes, and adopting a progressive income tax. I am open to discussions to raise revenue via an income tax on retirement income over $50,000/year, with the caveat that any tax scenario targeting retirement income must be progressive, with the greatest share to be born by those most able to afford it. I am also open to expanding the state sales tax to some services, with the stipulation that any expansion of this portion of the sales tax must also be structured in a way to reduce the regressive character of the sales tax and target those services used by higher-income residents.

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) We need sustainable solutions to honoring our promise to retirees and public sector workers, reached collaboratively with our workers and the labor unions that represent them. I support a three-pronged approach that includes an end to pension holidays, a move to a progressive income tax structure, and re-amortization of the state’s pension debt along the lines proposed by groups that include the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability -- all moves that, if taken in conjunction with one another, can build a sustainable path forward in addressing the State’s unfunded pension liability.

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) Chicago’s school pension question cannot be separated from school funding issues. The 1995 mayoral control law was passed in a climate in which the State also committed to providing 20 percent of support for Chicago teachers to the state pension fund -- a commitment that Illinois has failed to keep. The State needs to increase support for Chicago schools by increasing state spending on education and directing it in an equitable way to ensure that Chicago's students get what they need.

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) While my opponent strongly supports this approach, the reality is that over 60% of Illinois’ school districts are already trapped in deficit-spending scenarios. This unsustainable approach will inevitably simply create new losers and force districts to cut into funding for basic classroom education to meet the terms of this proposed legislation.

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) Illinois’ higher education system is an enormous economic engine of innovation, capacity-building and economic dynamism in the state -- and to continue to shortchange one of our most critical state resources borders on the criminal. At the same time, we’ve learned from a series of controversies that have challenged both our flagship universities and several community college systems that oversight, accountability and transparency must also be critical components of university governance. I support increasing support for public higher education, including our community college systems, in no small part as a means to reduce the debt burden that students must bear to pursue higher education and broaden students’ access to higher education that will strengthen their earning power and their capacity to contribute as productive members of their communities.

**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) Key parts of the state, including the Chicago metropolitan area, are critical national transportation hubs and enormously important public assets. Disinvestment in maintaining these systems undercuts our economic vitality and our role as a key player in both national and global commerce and presents a long-term threat to public safety. I support ensuring that revenue raised through the gas tax be targeted to infrastructure improvements -- rather than diverted to plug budget holes in other areas. That action alone would ensure that the roughly $1.8 billion/year generated by motor fuel taxes and sales taxes on fuel is actually directed to infrastructure improvements, while today on average [less than half](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-rauner-illinois-gas-tax-met-20150305-story.html) the money in the state’s main road fund go to highway construction and repair. I’m also open to considering strategies that include ensuring that the gas tax keeps pace with inflation, eliminating tax breaks for ethanol, increasing taxes and/or fees for fleet vehicles, and employing a per-mile fee system for vehicles over a certain weight.

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) 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) First and foremost, Illinois must move beyond the current budget impasse and develop fiscally responsible, sustainable budgeting and revenue strategies as a way to remove the uncertainty and lack of stability that the current budget crisis has created. Addressing our infrastructure needs -- improvements in roads, bridges and and our broad transit systems -- is also a critical component for manufacturing, including small and midsized companies. And investing in both academically-based research initiatives that collaborate with manufacturing sectors and workforce training for new and returning workers is critical as a way to ensure access to a highly trained pool of intellectual capital and skilled workforce participants who serve as the backbone for modern manufacturing development.

**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 support efforts to reduce carbon emissions, but mandating an revenue stream to bolster Excelon’s aging nuclear plant system is not the way to achieve this -- particularly given troubling safety concerns at some of Illinois’ nuclear power plants, We should instead, as a matter of policy, be supporting the expansion of wind and solar as options to reduce our carbon footprint.

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) I support the Illinois Clean Jobs bill and support increasing Illinois’ Renewable Portfolio Standard -- which if properly modified could end up cutting energy costs for consumers over the long term.

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. More broadly, I support strategies being advanced by the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition, including HB 2607 and SB 1485.

**Gun safety:**

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

A) Yes, I support both tighter gun background check laws and limiting straw gun purchases.

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

A) Yes, I support state licensing for all firearm 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 to promote the transparency and preservation of police disciplinary records, including legislation to include data on pedestrian and as motor vehicle stops by police for the purpose of gathering statistics on racial profiling.

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, I support working towards reducing Illinois’ adult prison population by 25% by 2025 -- a goal that must be tied to meaningful efforts to address concerns about how this will impact state workers currently employed to support Illinois’ correctional system. I also support sentencing reform that will reduce or eliminate prison terms for nonviolent drug offenses and support early release for aged and disabled prisoners assessed prior to release and authorized for meeting standards of minimal risk to public safety.

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

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 [Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission](https://ijjc-illinois-gov.epcsecure.com/sites/ijjc.illinois.gov/files/assets/IJJC%20-%20Improving%20Illinois%27%20Response%20to%20Sexual%20Offenses%20Committed%20by%20Youth%20-%20Press%20Release.pdf) has asserted that requiring juveniles to register as sex offenders can hamper rehabilitation efforts and have significant, long-term negative consequences for young perpetrators who are statistically unlikely to re-offend. I support efforts 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. I also support efforts to deliver rehabilitation therapy to adult offenders and limiting sex offender registry requirements for adults to those assessed to pose a danger to others.

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

A) ‘Merit’ selection of judges does not guarantee either a judge’s competency or integrity on the bench. I support crafting mechanisms -- including district-based elections modeled on the current judicial sub-circuit system -- that enhance the ability of non-white, non-male candidates to compete for judicial positions, and I support campaign finance reform efforts that reduce the ability of king-maker slating operations to dictate the composition of members of the judiciary.

**Other:**

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

A) Yes. More broadly, I support the goals and values behind the redistricting position advocated by the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform in its support for Independent Maps and its push for redistricting reform. This issue is not just about increasing competition between the two major political parties, but also about enhancing the ability of independent candidates to compete within their parties’ primary races -- including independent candidates who run with strong grassroots support but without the deep-pocketed financial backing of corporate elites or party apparatchiks.

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

A) I oppose Governor Rauner’s so-called workers’ compensation and tort reform efforts, which has been framed as a battle between trial lawyers and business advocates but is really an effort to undercut the right of ordinary residents to seek legal redress for injury and mistreatment.

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

A) I share Cook County Clerk David Orr’s support for automatic voter registration, specifically SB 2134.

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

A) Illinois needs dollar limits on campaign expenditures, public financing of elections, and the restoration of Illinois' cumulative voting system -- the elimination of which undercut the prospects for empowering a more truly progressive caucus in the Democratic Party, a dynamic that neither reflects the opinions of the majority of Democrats in the state nor reflects public opinion on core issues of concern. Restoring cumulative voting in the Illinois House would help to reverse the current dynamic, which disprivileges progressive platform planks. Illinois should also move its primary dates to days and seasons that enhance the likelihood of increased voter turnout.

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 teacher in my life was Virgie Woods, my 5th grade teacher.

She was a living example of responsible, compassionate leadership built on a sense of commitment to community. She challenged me and gave a sense of my possibilities and leadership ability. This veteran African American teacher was an elegant, eloquent Renaissance woman who I viewed as a leader not only in our school community but also in several civic and social organizations. She was a brilliant educator who used a well-rounded, intellectually stimulating curriculum that demanded academic rigor, but she also worked to bring out our own creativity and capacity for critical thinking and analysis by helping us learn to make short films, argue a point and shape an opinion based on facts and real-world outcomes. She exposed her students to institutions created by African American leaders like the DuSable Museum -- and ultimately, her influence on me helped me imagine my role in creating a better world.