**Name:** Martin McLaughlin

**District running for:** State Senate – District 26

**Political party:** Republican

**Political/civic background:** Village President, Barrington Hills & Chairman, Barrington Area Council of Governments

**Occupation:** Small businessman and financial expert, Managing Director of an Investment Management Firm specializing in defined benefit pension management.

**Education:** Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration, Illinois Wesleyan University

**Campaign website:** FixOurState.com

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

**Taxes/Budget:**

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

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

*2.     Expand the sales tax to services.*

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

*4.     Adopt a progressive income tax.*

I am not in favor of new taxes. The revenue growth that the state desperately needs will come through making Illinois business-friendly so that our current businesses remain and thrive, growing businesses relocate here, and entrepreneurs begin new successful ventures within our borders. To accomplish this, we must make our state competitive by reducing the cost of doing business in Illinois and streamlining the regulatory burden.

*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 problem created by years of fiscal mismanagement will not be solved overnight. However, because we cannot put more of the burden for government’s failures on the backs of Illinoisans (which would result in even more residents and businesses fleeing this state), we must look elsewhere to resolve our fiscal crisis and balance the budget.

Of course, we need to cut any wasteful spending that we can identify. However, I recognize that simply cutting wasteful programs will not solve our budget woes. I believe that government needs to follow the lead of the private sector and become more efficient. It is incomprehensible that we continue adding employees while our state is losing residents and our government is serving fewer people. By better utilizing technology, we can reduce our government workforce while providing expanded services. I would advocate a hiring freeze at the state and then work to reduce all departments through attrition.

Finally, we must institute pension reform. My position on this issue is detailed in my answer to the next question.

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?*

The objective with pension reform is to extend and protect the pension payments promised to state employees, as those pensions cannot constitutionally be “diminished or impaired,” while at the same time protecting the taxpayers of the state, who are being driven out of Illinois by an ever-growing tax burden.

To ensure we no longer compound the existing problem, I support a Tier 2 program for new state employees. This ensures they have a fully-funded, sustainable plan. This plan would also be available for existing employees to elect to join.

As people live longer, it is simple math that we cannot make our pension payments. Monthly benefits are determined by ensuring the full promised payout occurs by a certain age, called the “actuarial standard.” The state needs to move closer to the federal standard, which is roughly 10 years longer than Illinois’. This would not diminish benefits but rather pay those same promised benefits over a longer period of time, so I believe it would withstand any legal challenges.

We also need to address guaranteed compounded cost of living increases, which are resulting in many recipients getting more annually than they paid into the system in their lifetimes. I believe through negotiations, we can address this issue by providing consideration to the employees.

Private and corporate pension plans have been made solvent through negotiated agreements that restructured plans to extend and protect benefits. Why are we not doing the same thing with public pensions? We need to bring everyone to the negotiating table, including taxpayers, and finally agree to a resolution to this problem.

Finally, I do not support Springfield’s efforts to dump this liability onto school districts, and by extension property taxpayers.

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?*

I would support any effort that empowered our legislators to do the work they are elected to do. The status quo of allowing legislative leaders to continue the gridlock through control of the budget process has effectively ruined the state's finances over the last 30 years as evidenced by our unfunded pension liability, our dismal credit rating, and declining net population for those seeking refuge in surrounding states. It is time to change the status quo.

**Education:**

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

I believe that our schools can be improved through competition. I am in favor of giving our parents choice in their children’s education. My mother and sister were both teachers, and both of them believe that competition always leads to better results.

To accomplish this, we need to raise the cap on the number of charter schools and move to a funding system where the funding follows the students, so that schools are constantly competing to provide a better education to our children. We need to make fundamental changes to the system that improve results for our students, because the current system is failing as many as 2/3 of our students, and our academic achievement levels consistently rank in the bottom half of various national metrics.

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?*

I am not in favor of the state paying for promises made by Chicago politicians that were not sustainable. State taxpayers should not have to shoulder this burden.

In that vein, I believe that we need to pass measures that make local bodies more accountable for decisions they make effecting pension costs. While we cannot shift the pension debt to local school districts, which would simply result in massive property tax hikes (when our property taxes are already among the highest in the nation), we can pass reforms that ensure that local bodies are more accountable to the taxpayers.

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?*

I am in favor of supporting public higher education at spending levels which are competitive with similar states in our region. That said, administrative costs have skyrocketed and far outpaced the revenues generated by tuition increases. I believe that our public universities have to embrace the same commonsense, private-sector reforms that I am advocating for government and be more responsible with the tax and tuition dollars that are entrusted to them.

**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?*

Our first priority needs to be capturing a larger share of federal transportation dollars, because we receive among the lowest amount in federal dollars for infrastructure projects.

Beyond that, I believe that if additional funding is needed for infrastructure improvements, user fees are the best option over additional taxes.

I believe in the importance of investing in our infrastructure. In my Village, my predecessor had dramatically underfunded our road repaving program. In the three budgets I have implemented since being elected, I have reduced spending overall yet still been able to increase our road resurfacing budget to the level it needs to be to not only keep up with our Village’s needs but also work through the backlog created because of years of underfunding.

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

The state of Illinois has shown little to no ability to manage funding streams in the past, limiting my confidence level in a reliable management oversight. Should this need be something that requires funding, I would favor private capital in the form of municipal debt obligations or state debt obligations over a state managed revenue stream.

**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.*

I would work to reform workers compensation rules, so that we are more competitive with surrounding states. I would like to see a reduction in corporate taxes, but at minimum we should put in place a freeze on corporate taxes, which would provide manufactures some stability as the plan for the future. And I would work to create enterprise zones through the state that are specifically developed for manufacturing.

We must also search for innovative ways to strengthen our manufacturing base. For instance, encouraging our businesses and community colleges to work together to train the next generation of welders and machinists. I have also proposed an incentive for younger Illinois residents to put down their roots in Illinois by giving a state credit on interest paid on student loans if they meet certain criteria such as starting a business, buying a home, or pursuing a career in manufacturing in Illinois.

**Energy:**

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

I support development of all of our energy resources, including nuclear, natural gas, clean coal, and alternative energy, with a goal lowering costs for families and businesses while strengthening our economy.

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?*

The free market should dictate energy trends. Federal and state policies have not proven to accurately predict usage and demand, as evidenced by the federal solar debacle and the destruction of the coal industry. By contrast, the private sector has brought us increased energy output from natural gas and oil via scientific developments unrelated to government. The private sector is responding to economic pressures and developing more efficient and renewable sources, and doing so far more effectively than by government regulation.

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?*

I do not support cap-and-trade programs or carbon taxes, as both place unnecessary restrictions on energy production in the US. Instead, I support private sector advances in technologies which enhance energy production while limiting carbon output.

**Gun safety:**

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

I believe that we need to enforce the current gun laws before we consider instituting stricter or additional laws.

Our focus needs to be on stopping criminal behavior, not on restricting the rights of law-abiding citizens. We need to focus our efforts on criminals, such as mandatory penalties for crimes committed with guns. We should not be encroaching on an individual’s constitutionally-protected right to protect themselves and their family.

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

I support the licensing procedures currently in place for firearms dealers.

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

I oppose this, because it operates under the automatic assumption that gun owners are not responsible individuals, assumes that a court or attorney can make an accurate and timely decision in such cases, and creates a worrisome precedent for the limiting of an individual’s right to bear arms.

**Criminal justice:**

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

Yes, I support transparency as long as the production of those records does not impinge upon the individual municipal employee's rights.

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?*

I believe this is a laudable goal, but I hesitate to support a specific mandatory number which could result in negative consequences. I strongly support public-private partnerships, such as halfway houses, as an alternative option to incarceration as these programs have shown an improvement in recidivism rates and produce better outcomes at a lower cost to the public.

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?*

No, I do not support automatic expungement, particularly in the cases of sexual and violent offenses.

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

Wherever and whenever possible, I support consolidating government facilities for the benefit of efficiency, effectiveness, and reduced spending for the tax payers.

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?*

I am wary of these proposals, as it places reliance on the government to make these determinations, and government doesn’t do much well. I am in favor of sticking with the current system where sex offenders have to register, regardless of circumstance.

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

I do not support merit selection for judges as I believe the voters should decide who represents them. However, I do support a stronger judicial review system that includes options for expulsion from the bench, which provides an additional level of accountability.

**Other:**

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

I am strongly in favor of redistricting reform, as currently the politicians pick their voters rather than the voters picking their politicians. I believe that districts should be drawn based upon geography and population rather than on special interests and partisan bias.

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

I support both workers compensation reform and tort reform. Specifically, I believe we need to ensure causation in workers compensation claims, so that employees injured during personal activities or as the result of negligence are ineligible for compensation. I also do not favor “venue shopping,” where personal injury lawyers “shop around” for the friendliest court jurisdiction. We must shed our label as the “Lawsuit Abuse Capital of the Midwest” and ensure suits are filed in the appropriate jurisdiction.

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

I do not support automatic voter registration, as we provide multiple convenient ways for citizens to register to vote, from in person registration, to online registration, to registration through the mail. We must have a dedicated process for voter registration to protect the integrity of our election process.

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

We need term limits. We need to identify and elect candidates that are from outside the Springfield political system who have professional expertise, strong leadership qualities, and are unafraid to make difficult decisions that benefit their constituents instead of themselves. The status quo is not serving the state, or the taxpayers, well. Holding office is a public service, and by limiting terms in office we ensure a steady supply of leaders with fresh perspectives and the energy to continue working in the best interest of the voters and taxpayers.

I will lead by example. As the term that I am running for is a two year term, followed by two four year terms, I would limit myself to no more than 10 years as State Senator should the public see fit to continue to elect me.

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?*

The most important teacher in my life was Dr. William J Peterman. He was my high school's musical director at Elgin Academy. He recruited a quiet, shy, scholarship athlete and his friends and encouraged and taught us to try things outside of our comfort zones. His guidance provided me opportunities that helped me grow and develop as a 14 year old individual into a young adult. Many of his lessons I have used or relied upon in my professional and now public life.