**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Alonso Zaragoza

Ward: 36th Ward

Occupation: Reference Librarian

Education: Bachelor’s degree in Accounting from UIC

Master’s degree in Library and Information Science from Dominican University

Previous political and civic experience:

* Founder of the Chicago Progressive Aldermanic Candidates group
* Co-Founder of the Belmont-Cragin United Community Organization
* Member of the NW side Neighborhood Advisory Council tasked with evaluating charter school proposals for CPS.
* Elected community representative of the Lloyd Elementary School’s Local School Council from 2012 until present.
* Elected community representative of the Kelvyn Park High School’s Local School Council from 2012 until 2014.
* Directly involved in numerous political campaigns for progressive independent candidates throughout the city. (i.e. William Delgado, Miguel Del Valle, Will Guzzardi)
* Former State Chair, Northwest Chapter Chair, and Board Secretary for the Independent Voters of Illinois - Independent Precinct Organization (IVI-IPO)
* Former volunteer organizer for ICIRR and The Resurrection Project Chicago
* Board President of the Riis Park Advisory Council August 2005 to August 2006
* Board member and activist of the Belmont-Cragin Neighbors Association from 2004 to 2007
* Board liaison for the Cultural and Racial Diversity Committee of the Illinois Library Association from 2004 to 2006
* American Library Association member since 2004
* Active member of the Hermosa Community Organization from 2002 until 2008
* Elected community representative and secretary of the Northwest Middle School’s local school council from May, 2002 until May, 2004
* Volunteer Deputy Registrar for the County of Cook since April, 2002
* Tutored children at the Chicago Public Schools’ Audobon and Jungman branches from September, 1998 until May, 2000 through the Ameritech Scholarship Foundation
* Taught Catechism classes at St. Philomena Roman Catholic Church and St. Genevieve Roman Catholic Church for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders from August 1997 until August 1999

**1) City Pensions**

*Chicago's fire and police pensions are greatly underfunded, and the city is required by the state to make a $550 million payment into the pension funds by the end of 2015. Do you support restructuring the pension systems, inevitably reducing benefits, to put the funds on sound financial footing?*

Yes or **No**:

Please Explain:

The pension system should not be changed for retirees or current employees that are already paying into the pension system. A contract is a contract and must be honored. Illinois Constitution guarantees that municipal pension membership benefits are an enforceable contractual relationship which may not be diminished or impaired. Retirees deserve the right to plan for the remainder of their lives and changing their healthcare coverage after they have already earned their benefits is unfair and unjust.

The City of Chicago has the contractual and moral obligation to properly fund the police and fire (and other) pension funds. The City needs to make its expected actuarial required contribution (ARC) payments as is now required by law. Increased benefit costs to police officers fire fighters and investments proceeds will not alone solve the problem. Pension changes that I support would affect new hires only but benefits for retirees and current employees should not change. The City needs to find additional sources of revenues and direct them towards the massive pension debt that Chicago leadership has created for itself. TIF money can be used to help shore up the pension funds as can revenue that is created by building a casino in Chicago and the Peotone airport. A carefully structured commuter tax, a financial transaction tax, and recouping taxpayer money that was lost during CPS’ interest rate swap arrangements brings in additional revenue that can help alleviate the pension problem. If these solutions are not enough, as a last resort, we will need to raise taxes to make sure that Chicago pays off its obligations and continues to function, but property tax increases must be avoided by implementing the above revenue suggestions.

*Chicago's pension systems for municipal workers and laborers already have been restructured, reducing benefits, but the city has yet to identify where it will find the revenue to sufficiently fund those systems. Under what circumstances would you support a property tax increase to raise the needed revenue for the fire and police pensions and/or the municipal workers and laborers pensions?*

Under no circumstance would I support a property tax increase in the City of Chicago. The City needs to find additional sources of revenues and direct them towards the massive pension debt that Chicago leadership has created for itself. TIF money can be used to help shore up the pension funds as can revenue that is created by building a casino in Chicago and the Peotone airport. A carefully structured commuter tax, a financial transaction tax, and recouping taxpayer money that was lost during CPS’ interest rate swap arrangements brings in additional revenue that can help alleviate the pension problem. If these solutions are not enough, as a last resort, we will need to raise certain taxes to make sure that Chicago pays off its obligations and continues to function, but property tax increases must be avoided by implementing the above revenue suggestions.

**2) Chicago Public Schools pensions**

*Large and growing payments required to keep the Chicago Teachers’ Pension Fund solvent are squeezing CPS' budget, forcing cuts elsewhere and limiting investment. The Chicago Board of Education has increased property taxes, but it is not enough to keep up with the high annual costs. What measures do you support to ensure a solvent retirement system and to improve the district's finances?*

The City needs to find additional sources of revenues and direct them towards the massive Chicago Teachers’ pension debt that Chicago leadership has created for itself. First, CPS needs to focus our limited resources on existing schools. We cannot continue to open up new additional schools (for-profit charters) when our existing public schools are in dire need of additional resources and funding. We can also create revenue for the teacher pension by freeing up millions in unallocated TIF, harness revenue that can be generated by building a casino in Chicago and the building of the Peotone airport. A carefully structured commuter tax, a financial transaction tax, and recouping taxpayer money that was lost during CPS’ interest rate swap arrangements brings in additional revenue that can help alleviate the pension problem.

**3) Revenue**  
  
*In light of the financial issues discussed above, do you support any or all of the following measures, each of which would require****,*** *at a minimum, approval by the Illinois Legislature?*

*\* A statewide expansion of the sales tax base to include more consumer services*

**Yes** or No:

*\* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city*

**Yes** or No:

*\* A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago’s trading exchanges, known as the “LaSalle Street tax”*

**Yes** or No:

Please explain your views, if you wish, on any of these three revenue-generating measures.

**4) Crime**

Do you support hiring more police officers to combat crime and gun violence in Chicago?

**Yes** or No:

Please explain:

To ensure adequate police coverage across the city, I will advocate for the hiring of additional police officers spread across all the police districts.The additional police can be paid for with the money that is currently being used for police overtime. I also propose the hiring of retired police officers (at a negotiated hourly rate) to perform routine administrative work within our districts, so that our patrolman can get out of the police stations and into the neighborhoods where they can do the most good. I would also strengthen the gutted C.A.P.S program and have meetings every month again instead of just once a month. The community needs an effective way C.A.P.S program to build a continuous working relationship with the police officers that serve their community. Hiring more police does not reduce crime significantly unless we also provide opportunities like jobs and job training skills for our youth and positive alternatives to the gang lifestyle.

*What legislation in Springfield would you support to try to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago?*

We must first enforce legal existing gun control laws before creating additional ones. I suggest that we publish chain of ownership of firearms used in homicides and illegal public shootings where lives are put at risk, fine people who sell firearms but report them stolen, and apply an annual registration fee on some firearms.

***5) Elected school board***

*An advisory referendum on switching Chicago to an elected school board, rather than an appointed board, is expected to be on the ballot in more than 30 wards on Feb. 24. Currently, the mayor appoints all seven board members**and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?*

*Yes or No:*

*Please explain:*

I don’t believe that the current Chicago Public School board members are managing our schools at the level that taxpayers deserve. I support a change to an elected representative school board and I am the only candidate running in the 36th Ward to have personally collected signatures to get the ERSB placed on the ballot in our ward. An ERSB could help bring about important changes to the Chicago Public Schools. An ERSB will ensure that CPS concentrates our limited resources on strengthening existing public schools before opening up additional schools including charter schools. An ERSB would hold board meetings at night or on weekends to allow for more community participation. An ERSB would support the longer school day by providing more structure and funding to schools to make sure that those longer hours are efficiently used and increase the performance of students.

***6) Tax-increment financing districts***

*TIFs are the primary economic development tool of the city. In a TIF district, taxes from the growth in property values are set aside for 23 years to be used for public projects and private development. Do you support increasing the annual TIF surplus that the mayor and the City Council have declared in each of the last few years, money that goes to the schools and other city agencies?*

***Yes*** *or No:*

*What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program?*

The TIF system needs reform. We need a complete audit and accounting of Chicago’s TIF program. The program is not transparent enough and the City should do a better job of letting taxpayers know where their money is going to and have input on the process. The responsibility of informing taxpayers about how a TIF functions belongs to the City, not to activists like Tom Tresser. Excess TIF money should be returned to the libraries, schools, parks, and other local units of governments that need the lost tax revenue to operate properly. TIF money should also be used primarily in communities that are truly blighted to create economic opportunities all over Chicago, not just downtown. We should also guarantee that jobs created with TIF money go towards Chicagoans and not suburban residents. I would not support expansions of TIF districts in my ward. I certainly do not support the use of TIF money for Marriott or DePaul.

***7) Neighborhood economic development***

*What would you do as alderman to boost economic development in your ward, and bring jobs to your community?*

An Alderman has incredible influence in attracting employers to their ward. My aldermanic office will work closely with all businesses to help them navigate through Chicago’s governmental red tape and help grow our business community and job opportunities for ward residents. Our Ward office will also have computers available to ward residents with resume software installed and offer etiquette workshops so that ward residents will be prepared for job fairs and be far more attractive to employers. I will personally be involved in the business community and will help create a chamber of commerce in the ward, something that is severely lacking and would attract new businesses to our ward. I will also let employers know that they are not going to be threatened by their new Alderman for failing to make political contributions or putting up campaign signs on windows, the way past aldermen have. I will also use available TIF money to attract businesses into our ward and to beautify our business districts.

I want our ward to be greener, smarter, and more productive than any other ward in the city. We must think creatively about how we use the limited spaces available to us in the 36th Ward. I want to provide opportunities for efficient development in the ward that preserve the identity and unique characteristics of our neighborhoods on all ends of the new ward. I am dedicated to working with neighbors, community organizations, elected officials, existing business owners, and property owners to create a healthy local business community within our ward. On all major development issues, I will assess the issues, develop a comprehensive plan, implement these plans on time and on budget, and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan.

***8) Size of the Chicago City Council***

*The City Council has 50 members, but civic groups and other regularly argue for reducing the size of the Council. What should the size of the Council be? Please provide a specific number. And why?*

50. No we should not reduce the number of alderman in the City Council. Reducing the number of alderman will make it far harder to run for office and win an election. If the ward boundaries were doubled, a candidate would need to raise more special interest money and certainly be beholden to politicians with large political organizations to win. We need more independent leaders running for office not more rubberstamp aldermen.

***9) A Chicago casino***

*Do you support, in general concept, establishing a gambling casino in Chicago?*

***Yes*** *or No:*

*Please explain:*

I am supportive of establishing a gambling casino in Chicago but it must be implemented carefully to ensure that the negative effects of gambling and possible corruption are diminished. We are losing jobs and revenue to casinos in the suburbs and other states and to suburbs with video gambling surrounding the city. Before a casino is built in Chicago, we must first open up the mental health clinics that the Mayor closed and open addiction counseling centers in communities where gambling addiction is possible.

***10) Red light and speed cameras***

*Does the city have an acceptable number of red light and speed cameras currently, and are they properly employed?*

*Yes or* ***No****:*

*Please explain:*

The City of Chicago does not have an acceptable number of red light and speed cameras. We have way too many of them and they are not properly employed. A recent study showed that the statistics that the Mayor used to support the effectiveness of the cameras were inflated and that these cameras actually increase the percentage of rear-end crashes. These cameras are just being used to unfairly generate revenue from hard working Chicagoans.

***11) Ward issues***

*What are the top three issues in your ward — the ones you talk about most on the campaign trail?*

The greatest concerns that I have heard while canvassing my ward are the lack of basic city services like tree trimming and graffiti removal, the wide-spread increase of crime throughout the ward, and the number of empty store fronts along our main streets.