**Name: Chris Harris**

**District running for: 7th (IL Gen Assembly)**

**Political party: Democratic**

**Political/civic background: Elected Village Commissioner in Forest Park in 2011, Vice President Kiwanis, WCMC Transportation Committee Member, Chair Annual Wounded Warrior Fundraiser, Chair Events for Little Friends**

**Occupation: Proprietor – CHM&M, a B2B Marketing company**

**Education:** BA Communications WIU, Post Baccalaureate Political Science Northwestern University

**Campaign website:** www.Harris4StateRep.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.*

1. I think tax hikes need to be a last resort. I don’t feel the economy is in a position to hit working class people with more tax increases, especially since Chicago, other municipalities and Cook County are increasing taxes all too often. I think a forensic audit of the budget needs to be done (last and/or proposed budget). Let’s really get into the nuts and bolts of where we can cut, get the $7 billion dollar number down and then talk about tax increases in partnership with other revenue sources such corporate sponsorships.

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) Yes, we have to for this state to even have a chance at a future. First and foremost, you don’t touch what is existing. You cannot go backwards and retool what so many hardworking people have paid into and the results they have earned. I have worked on union contract negotiations on the municipal level – there is give and take, there is a realistic way to have the onus be a shared responsibility, but first you need to bring all parties to the table with a realistic goal with a gradual approach.

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) No. A general function of the entire legislature should be passing a budget and having the spirited debate that goes with that.

**Education:**

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

A) The state has, by constitutional mandate, the primary responsibility to fund schools. Yet, it doesn’t. Currently, the state portion is roughly 25%. I would be in favor of a system that is fair for all parties and alleviates property tax burdens – but I’m also leery of giving a cash strapped legislature more power over our tax dollars. The children shouldn’t suffer and in my district they suffer and my opponent, as the former D209 school board president, is responsible for a decade of mismanagement of the funds we did have. He abused a system to a point where the state of Illinois had to step in to oversee the district’s finances.

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) No, the state shouldn’t be responsible for the irresponsibility of Chicago. As for shifting the burden in other communities, I don’t think a shift of that magnitude is realistic. You have districts that are already financially strapped, and you would be looking at major property tax hikes, if we keep the current funding structure, for it to have a chance. Ask some folks in suburban Cook if they could afford a major climb in their property taxes. It’s not reasonable.

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) Education is a priority at all levels. Education in all forms. Affordable college, community college and vocational school is a must. Our state schools need a realistic budget and funding comes from various sources. Let’s examine the best options where the deficiencies are.

**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) Something I have been an advocate for on the municipal level is corporate sponsorship to offset costs. Naming things after dead politicians or dead politicians spouses is nonsense. There are valuable ad opportunities and sponsorship opportunities for buildings, bridges, roads, etc. Sure it would be an adjustment to get used, but with companies completely retooling their ad budgets now is the time to rethink how we do things.

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) Anyone with any business sense would have shot a system like this, with no foresight, down from the start, but we, unfortunately, see this at all levels of government. Long term planning is absolutely needed. We have dropped the ball for years, so yes, we need to have a plan in place and the funds need to be self-sufficient not come from an outside taxing or revenue source.

**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) I live in a district that used to be rich in industry. When these factories go the commerce that surrounds them goes as well. So not only do you have an empty factory, you have a diner that can’t survive, the convenience store struggles, etc. It completely changes the dynamic of a community. It’s no secret that companies get incentives to move or stay. I have been a part of those deals. I would also work with the municipalities to come up with a package that makes these business want to move to their community – the municipalities really have a large say in that – but it takes a team effort. I would also make sure the worker environment is friendly so the business will not just survive but 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 think all sources of alternative energy need to be explored with nuclear only being a part of that.

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 both, in theory. I am more for the common sense theory of renewable energy is inevitable. We should effort, from all angles, to use green solutions as the first choice without a mandate. Wind, hydro turbines, solar: they may all require infrastructure updates but all also offer a clean solution that just makes sense.

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 see the benefits in both and would support ‘common sense’ approaches.

**Gun safety:**

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

A) I do not support more invasive background checks; I do support limiting straw gun purchases.

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

A) As long as it doesn’t infringe on sportsmen/women and hunter’s rights to trade, sell and show.

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

A) Immediate family members only, but there needs to be very detailed medical criteria.

**Criminal justice:**

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

A) Support. Transparency should be the expectation not the wish.

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) Absolutely. I think nonviolent drug offenses should be moved to community service; keeping people in the community not removing them should be the goal. The early release is, obviously, based on the crime as well as their physical state – so you don’t get a pass just for being ‘aged’, it needs to make sense. But on all accounts, we need to completely rethink the criminal justice system and work to make recidivism minimal. Community outreach programs and second chance opportunities build a better person than prison can.

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) Depends on the crime but for most, 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) If they are not needed, consolidation would make sense.

Q) *What is your view on a proposal to end the placement of juveniles on the state’s sex offender registry based on assessment of their risk and likelihood to reoffend and/or benefit from treatment? For adult sex offenders, what is your view on delivery of rehabilitation therapy and limiting sex offender registry restrictions only to those men and women assessed to pose a danger to others?*

A) I believe we need to be very careful here on all accounts and of what we determine to be ‘a danger to others’. These crimes are hideous in nature and ruin other people’s lives, I am not for making their lives easier as they have done things to make other people’s lives harder.

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

A) I believe we at least need to sensibly remove special interest money from the election of judges.

**Other:**

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

A) Absolutely. And it shouldn’t even take that, as a grid based on population levels is all that is needed.

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

A) There needs to be some basic reform. I wholeheartedly believe in protecting workers’ rights but have also, on the municipal level, seen firsthand issues of abuse of workers compensation. The ‘percentage’ of the injury happening at work is often talked about – and I think there is a point for discussion there. Sensible tort reform, again is open for debate, but ultimately if it trims the power of the individual and that power to hold a company, doctor or hospital liable for their actions, especially in the case of a company or person not disclosing or being misleading about their product or actions then I am against it. On the medical side, a cap on awards has been tried in the past, how do we get past the constitutionality of that? It’s not easy.

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

A) Access to voting should be easy and accessible, but even if you get people registered you can’t force them to go to the polls.

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

A) A complete overhaul. The state of Illinois allows for walking on the line of ethical and illegal. Politicians in the know exploit and abuse it – the citizens suffer. We have politicians who are lawyers who have clients who get amazing breaks and perhaps then that client donates to their campaign – it shows a pattern of moral bankruptcy.

The lazy campaign reform from about a decade ago left holes for people in the know and people with big donors to exploit it. If you want the best candidates to have a chance, you take big money out of politics. Lobbying reform is also needed, you should not be able to serve as an elected official, or on the staff of an elected official, and immediately use the relationships you have developed for personal gain.

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) Easy question. Mr. Travers, he was encouraging and engaging, and had a personal approach and an understanding for each individual. He wanted you to succeed, and he would take the extra time to get to know each student and would work with them to help them succeed. If you wanted to do well in his class you would. It wasn’t open a book and follow a decade-old lesson plan; it was engaging and exciting.