

2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Carlos Ramirez-Rosa

Ward: 35

Occupation: Community Organizer

Education: B.A. in Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 2011

Previous political and civic experience:

I was elected community representative to the Avondale-Logandale Local School Council, and previously served as a community representative on the Sullivan High School Local School Council. I have served as a high school debate coach, a tutor and mentor to Chicago Public School students, and have volunteered for various campaigns, including Miguel Del Valle for Mayor, Rudy Lozano Jr. for State Representative, Jesus 'Chuy' Garcia for Commissioner, Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez, and Ramon Ocasio for Judge. I organized to keep schools open, and I organized to keep families together by stopping deportations. I served two years as Democratic Committeeman for Cunningham Township Precinct 5 in Champaign County, IL, elected to that position in the 2008 primary. I previously worked as a congressional caseworker in the Fourth District of Illinois, and a community organizer with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

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?

No, the Illinois Constitution is clear, and the courts have found that actions to reduce benefits are unconstitutional. A pension is a promise – our public employees kept their end of the promise by meeting their contribution requirements; retired public employees should not be punished because the legislature failed to act responsibly. I will work to ensure we generate the revenue required to meet our pension liability, while protecting our homeowners from property tax increases. I support the proposed LaSalle Street Tax – a measure to close a corporate tax loophole on major financial transaction. I also support TIF reform – to ensure more property tax dollars go to our city's taxing bodies; and I support a commuter tax and a fair tax in Illinois. A fair tax will lift the tax burden off of our working families and ensure we are generating sorely needed revenue.

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?

I am opposed to a property tax increase. Instead of reaching deeper in to the pockets of regular Chicagoans, I believe we should create tax fairness, reform our broken TIF system, and close corporate tax loopholes.

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?

As previously stated I would like to generate more state funding for our schools by implementing a fair tax in Illinois. I would also reform our TIF system to ensure more property tax dollars go to CPS, unlike my opponent who voted against turning over TIF surplus dollars to our neighborhood public schools. I would push to close corporate tax loopholes by supporting measures like the LaSalle Street Tax.

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**

No, I am opposed to regressive taxes on regular Chicagoans.

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

Yes, it is important that everyone who benefits from Chicago's public services and infrastructure contribute to the city's bottom-line.

*** A tax on electronic financial transactions on Chicago's trading exchanges, known as the "LaSalle Street tax"**

Yes, I believe this is an important step towards closing corporate tax loopholes and generating sorely needed revenue.

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

In the Chicago status quo the city's budget is balanced on the backs of hardworking families. Every time the city institutes new regressive taxes or fines our families are asked to dig deeper in to their pockets while well-connected corporations and campaign contributors are rewarded with government largesse. I am running on behalf of my ward's working families to put our neighborhoods first and provide the quality city services they deserve – that necessitates closing corporate tax loopholes and implementing new revenue generating measures that will ask everyone that benefits from Chicago's commonwealth contribute to Chicago's commonwealth. I believe this is an issue of fundamental fairness and decency.

4) Crime

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

Yes, I believe we should hire 1,000 additional police officers. Hiring 1,000 additional police officers will help ensure that our police department is properly staffed, not overworked, and capable of consistently working their beat and properly implementing community policing best practices.

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

The courts have limited Chicago and Springfield's ability to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago. However, I support sensible regulations of gun sales at gun shows. I also support a gun registry similar to Illinois' current statute requiring vehicle registration; and a statewide assault weapon ban. That said, we need Indiana to step up and regulate the sale of guns at gun shows.

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, as a strong proponent of the democratic process I believe that parents and taxpayers should have a real voice in the governance of their schools. Chicago has the ignominious distinction of being among the 6% of municipalities where parents and taxpayers do not have a real voice and accountability in the governance and administration of public schools.

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, I support legislation to ensure that more TIF surplus dollars are directed to our neighborhood public schools.

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

I believe we should limit the creation of TIF districts to truly blighted areas where development would not occur but for government support. I would eliminate TIF districts in Chicago's affluent neighborhoods, and support legislation that reforms our campaign finance system and removes any specter of pay-to-play politics in the disbursement of TIF funds. I also support legislation to ensure TIF surplus dollars are more readily turned over to our city's taxing bodies.

7) Neighborhood economic development

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

Chicago's 35th Ward is a vibrant area on the city's northwest side. The 35th Ward is socioeconomically diverse, and is home to transplants from across the nation and the globe. The ward's main commercial corridors of Armitage, Fullerton, Diversey, Milwaukee, Belmont, Irving Park, and Lawrence are filled with family-owned small businesses. Addison hosts two big-box stores. As Alderman, I will work to support our ward's small business owners. My ward service office will host a small business center that will help connect small businesses with the ward's available commercial spaces and help small business owners cut through government red tape. As much as possible I will privilege the development of locally owned small businesses over big box stores or national retailers. I will explore the potential of a "micro currency" for the 35th Ward – to spur the circulation of local dollars, and will also work to attract a midsized boutique hotel to the 35th Ward's Logan Square neighborhood.

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?

I support a 25 member City Council. I believe that this will help reign in rising City Council salary expenses, and bring us in line with other major U.S. cities.

9) A Chicago casino

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

Yes, casino gaming already exists in Chicagoland – however, Chicagoans do not directly benefit from the revenue produced by this casino gaming. Bringing a single casino to downtown Chicago will ensure that Chicagoans directly benefit by the revenue created by casino gaming and add to Chicago's tourism industry by giving tourists another place to spend money in Chicago. Casino gaming will also create good jobs for Chicagoans.

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?

No, Chicago must move away from regressive fines that dig deeper in to regular Chicagoans' pockets. Recent research and media coverage has made me concerned that the red light and speed cameras are not good for public safety, and my constituents support their elimination.

11) Ward issues

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

I have knocked thousands of doors in the 35th Ward since August 26th. My ward's residents most readily complain about an unresponsive ward service office, a lack of city funding for neighborhood needs – like pothole repair and tree removal, and a City Council that continuously puts corporate and special interests before community needs. Ultimately, I am running on behalf of my ward's working families to put our neighborhoods first and ensure that City Hall is working for working people, not big and powerful corporations or special interests.