**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Michael R. Zalewski

Ward: 23

Occupation: Alderman

Education: Nathan Hale Grammar School, John F. Kennedy High School, Morraine Valley Community College

Previous political and civic experience: Alderman. I began my career loading the back of a garbage truck for Streets & Sanitations. I then worked plowing snow, filling potholes, and trimming trees. Providing quality city services and making sure our neighborhoods are safe and strong has always been my top concern.

**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?

Police and firefighters risk their lives everyday for our safety, and they have diligently paid into the system. They should not be penalized. However, we need to be working within realistic financial constraints and make sure that the pension systems are sustainable going forward. Any changes should have the input from all stakeholders, including people who are currently employed as well as retirees.

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 think we should explore other options before resorting to raising property taxes on middle class families.

**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?

A Chicago casino could help generate revenue that could be used for education, including the teachers pension systems. Boosting economic development will additionally help. I also support streamlining government spending. Residents are doing more with less, so should city council. I support reducing the number of council committees as well as reducing aldermanic expense accounts. There may be other areas that we can trim without reducing the quality of services and programs. Education should always be a top priority in the budget.

**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, that would unfairly penalize senior citizens

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

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

Yes

**4) Crime**

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

Yes. I will continue advocating for increased patrols, supporting efforts to prevent gangs and gun violence from moving into our ward, and by cracking down on criminals who attempt to prey on our children by banning sex offenders from public libraries.

I work very closely with three neighborhood watch volunteer groups, Garfield Ridge Neighborhood Watch Group, Clearing Night Force, and the Archer Heights Civic Association. These are groups where community residents volunteer their time to patrol our streets, parks, schools, and alleys and notify Chicago Police if they see anything unusual. They are also strong court advocates, which helps keep criminals from using our community for repeat crimes. I support the CAPS program, which keeps residents involved. I advocated for an 8th Police District sub-station and encourage police cars to remain in their respective beats whenever possible. I additionally have my staff patrol our streets on a regular basis to look for gang graffiti so it can be removed immediately.

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

First and foremost, I support increasing our police force, and moving more officers from desk jobs to the patrols. I support tougher sentencing for dangerous, violent criminals. I would support statewide legislation demanding mandatory minimum sentences of 5 years for any crime committed with a gun. I would also support a “three strikes you’re out” policy that imposes mandatory life sentences for violent criminals who commit three crimes with a gun.

**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 membersand the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?

I am interested to see the results from the ballot initiative, and I would also like to know more information about what a proposed elected school board would look like and whether or not there would be additional costs associated with it.

**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?

I have supported the use of TIFs to boost economic development in my ward, to help a business move in and hire local people. Example: Shop N Save market, a grocery store that replaced a Dominick’s that had closed and had become a vacant eyesore in our community. It is now employing 120 people. I support making the TIF process more transparent and inclusive, and incorporating community input into how they are used.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

I have supported efforts to bring in new businesses that hire local workers. I helped bring in Meade Electric Co. to the ward from the suburbs to create jobs locally. I helped bring in Shop N Save into a vacant Dominick’s that was an eyesore for the community. Shop N Save has now created 120 jobs for local people. We need to continually back efforts that will revitalize economic development along Archer Avenue. I plan to continue working with community residents and stakeholders to promote our neighborhood to all types of businesses. A good way to attract new business is to provide a safe, clean neighborhood environment so that residents will want to work and shop locally.

**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?

First we should reduce the number of committees and reduce the size of aldermanic expense accounts. I am remaining open to reducing the size of city council, but it would depend on the specific proposal. I would want to ensure that city services are still accessible to residents, and I would also want to make sure they still have a strong voice.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes

**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?

Over the years, I have heard from fire department officials about drivers abusing traffic light caution (yellow lights) and causing horrific crashes. Adding countdown times at intersections with red-light cameras was something I instituted to assist drivers in knowing the amount of time they have before the signal changes to yellow. This has dramatically reduced the number of tickets being issues to residents.

A study came out recently in the news detailing how red light cameras do not improve safety. Before taking action, I would need more information from the Department of Transportation, and the police and fire departments to accurately understand and weigh their benefits and costs. If additional studies and data prove that the cameras are not improving traffic and public safety, then I would support reversing their implementation.

**11) Ward issues**

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

Public safety, city services, and education are my top concerns. The 23rd ward is a great place to work, live and raise a family, and I am committed to making sure it stays safe and strong. I am committed to increasing police patrols so that gangs and gun violence do not enter our neighborhoods. I am also cracking down on criminals who prey on our children by supporting a new ordinance that would ban sex offenders from public libraries.

I have lived in the 23rd ward my entire life. I attended the local public schools, and worked part-time in our neighborhood stores while going to school. My public service career began with loading the back of a garbage truck for Streets & Sanitations. To serve my community as the alderman is the greatest privilege of my life; it is a responsibility and passion that I take very seriously. As a former Deputy Commissioner of the Bureau of Sanitation and as President Pro-Tempore of the City Council, I know how both city departments work. I know that we can reduce spending in the legislative branch, and I am continually dedicated to making sure our streets are safe and looked after.