**Name:** Robin Kelly

**District running for:** IL-02

**Political/civic background:** Democrat

**Occupation:** U.S. Congresswoman

**Education:** B.A., Psychology, M.A., Counseling - Bradley University; PhD, Political Science, NIU

**Campaign website:** www.robinkellyforcongress.com

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

**Legislative priorities:**

Q) *What are your three top national legislative priorities for the country?*

A) First and foremost, Congress must pass jobs legislation. There is more that this Congress can do to tap into the innovative spirit of Americans, and more we can do to help our Mom and Pop businesses expand. We have to bring businesses into blighted communities, and we must make investments that spur the growth of the job creators of tomorrow.

In response to the community concerns that I’m hearing from families in the Second district, the three national legislative priorities that I’m focused on are:

1. *The Health Equity and Accountability Act (HEAA)* - In pursuing the promise of a healthier future for America, I am working to strengthen our public health infrastructure and support community-oriented, multi-disciplinary approaches to American health that leverage strategic partnerships to help shape policy to close the national health equity gap.

We find ourselves at a crossroads in healthcare. Health disparities in communities of color continue to be barriers to opportunity. In 2016, it is unconscionable that African Americans are infected with HIV at a rate that is eight times that of White Americans. African American women are 40 percent more likely to die from the disease. Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans are diagnosed with lupus two–to–three times more frequently than Caucasians.

These statistics represent our husbands, wives, friends, and neighbors. The tragedies of these numbers impact us all and rob our communities of the promise they deserve.

1. H.R. 224, *The Recognizing Gun Violence as a Public Health Emergency Act*- There is no doubt that gun violence is a national problem. This bill would require the U.S. Surgeon General to submit to Congress an annual report on the effects of gun violence on the public’s health. A growing body of research suggests that gun violence is a public health epidemic and that repeated exposure to shootings in urban areas such as Chicago causes trauma that is akin to the trauma suffered by soldiers in war zones. This legislation would examine gun violence in America as a public health threat, investigating the physical, emotional, societal and economic impact of the epidemic.
2. H.R. 3790 – *The Diversity in Science Technology And Nurturing Capable Educators (DISTANCE) Act*. China now graduates four times as many engineers as the U.S., and India graduates a million more students from college than we do. To make sure that we remain competitive, create new industry here in Illinois and across the country, and remain the global leader in innovation. To do this, we must be armed with a well-educated STEM workforce. This bill will achieve the President’s goal of preparing 10,000 new STEM teachers, and inspiring a more diverse STEM talent pool, by encouraging college students who’ve studied the STEM disciplines to enter and continue in the teaching profession.

Q: *What are the three most important issues in your district on which you believe the federal government needs to act?*

1. (1.) Jobs: More can be done to create jobs here in the Second District, and there are a number of ways that the federal government can support job growth here – by way of tax incentive, supporting investments in bourgeoning industry, and finding ways to keep businesses here in the Stats.

(2) Gun violence: Every day in America, we navigate the threat of gun violence. This threat permeates all corners of our country, from street corners to cul-de-sacs, shattering our sense of security and insidiously altering how we live. With over 30 Americans being killed by a gun every single day, inaction is not an option. Congress has a moral obligation to address the public health epidemic of gun violence in America. We must act now to pass reasonable and responsible gun safety laws to save lives.

(3) Housing: Still too many people are at risk of losing their homes, and the Second District leads the state in foreclosure. I support programs that work to keep people in their homes and avoid foreclosure, as well as programs that support first time homeownership. Essential to these efforts is ensuring that mortgage and housing finance documents are clear and understandable, and mortgage lenders do not take on excessive risk or extend credit to those who cannot afford it. Congress can do more to enhance transparency in this respect, and more to keep families in their homes.

Q) *What is your biggest fundamental difference with your opponent(s)?*

A) Unlike my opponents, I have an extensive, demonstrable record of commitment to public service, starting as a village administrator in Matteson, to becoming State Representative of the 38th Legislative District, then Chief of Staff in the Office of the Illinois State Treasurer, then Chief Administrative Officer to Cook County before finally ascending to my current seat. Consequently, I have developed an intricate working knowledge of the legislative process at both the state and federal level.

**Transparency:**

Q) *Will you pledge to make public: a) your campaign schedule; b) your fundraiser schedule and the names of all fundraiser hosts ; c) if elected, your daily schedule of meetings? If not, why not?*

A) Currently, my campaign schedule is made public on my political Facebook site, as is information for upcoming fundraisers.

Q) *Please list all relatives on public or campaign payrolls and their jobs on those payrolls.*

A) None.

**National security:**

Q) *What are the most important actions Congress can take to reduce the threat of ISIS abroad and at home?*

A) ISIS poses a real and immediate threat to U.S. The first significant step that Congress can do is work to effectively bolster an international coalition to combat ISIS. I have no doubt that America is militarily and diplomatically strong enough to remedy the ISIS threat. It is important that Congress leads the way in offering strategic action on the diplomatic (coalition building) front, support intelligence operations that give us a clear picture of the scope and capabilities of ISIS, and provide the resources to coalition partners to degrade the threat.

Q) *What bans, if any, do you support on Muslim admissions to the United States? Please explain your position.*

A) I don’t support bans on Muslim admissions to the U.S. and don’t believe in singling out a particular group of individuals in an adverse way based on faith. The threat to America is not a Muslim threat – and it is worth noting that America Muslims were killed in the Towers on 9/11 and Muslim’s around the world have been victimized by ISIS and the Taliban. Many of the threats we face on the home front and globally can be categorized as threats posed by violent extremists. Not Muslims.

Q) *Specifically, how would you have, or how did you, vote on the American Security Against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act of 2015 and its efforts to make it harder for Syrian and Iraqi refugees to enter the U.S.? Please explain your position.*

A) I voted against the SAFE Act because the language of the bill would undermine much of the robust security screening protocol we already have in place. This bill would effectively halt the admission of Syrian and Iraqi refugees—vulnerable individuals who are often women and children—into the United States even though refugees are already the most rigorously vetted population admitted to this country.

Q) *Do you support a Syrian no-fly zone or the U.S. enforcement of Syrian humanitarian safe zones? Why or why not?*

A) I think more must be done to ensure that Syrian civilians are protect from the horrors of this conflict. I’m supportive of efforts to reduce casualties tied to flying IED’s and “barrel bombs," and trust the judgment of America’s military strategists who are advising the President on “no fly zones” and other humanitarian policies that will do just that.

Q) *Regarding the House Benghazi Select Committee, should its investigation remain open-ended, or should the panel be given a deadline to complete its work? Please explain.*

A) The Benghazi Committee has been in existence for over 600 days and nearly 20 months, with no signs of issuing a final analysis anytime soon. Sadly what should’ve been an impactful Select Committee that could usher in real reforms to keep our nation and diplomatic core safer, has been reduced to a hyper-partisan, underperforming Committee at the expense of our tax dollars.

For some context, The 9/11 Commission, which lasted about the same amount of time as the Benghazi Committee interviewed more than 1,000 people in 10 countries and conducted 10 days of public hearings. By comparison to date, the Benghazi panel has interviewed 64 government officials last year, very few of which were made public.

Q) *What measures, if any, do you support to give U.S. authorities access to encrypted or “dark web” communications about potential terrorist plots? Please explain.*

A) I am supportive of legal efforts made in the imperative national security interest of our country. This applied to threats presented by state and non-state actors, and threats that appear in the cyber space.

Q) *Do you support transferring the detention of terrorism suspects from Guantanamo Bay to the United States? Why or why not?*

A) I do. I’m confident that our prison and national security infrastructure is sophisticated, reliable and advanced enough to manage the detention of terrorism suspects.

**Gun violence:**

Q) *What is the single most important action Congress can take to reduce U.S. gun violence?*

A) I believe that the single most important action Congress can take is to reduce gun violence is to pass comprehensive background check legislation, which would include closing gun show loop holes. Currently too many prohibited persons, those with criminal intent and persons at high risk of committing crimes, can acquire firearms readily, due to the inconsistency of our current patchwork of background check laws. Consequently, a majority of Americans, including many NRA members, support efforts to expand and make more uniform background checks.

Q) *Do you support or oppose the ‘‘Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act?” Please explain your position.*

A) I support the aforementioned act; I am opposed to a system that allows individuals on the terror watch list to purchase firearms.

**Climate change:**

Q) *Do you believe there is scientific evidence of climate change, and is it caused by human activity? What is your position on the Paris climate change agreement?*

A) As 2015 has recently been deemed the warmest year on historical record in the world, I have no doubt that climate change is, in large part, a consequence of human emissions of greenhouse gases. As such, I am very supportive of the Paris climate change agreement. While there are still many details to be fleshed out, the willingness of 196 countries to acknowledge the crisis of climate change and commit to addressing it is momentous.

**Economy:**

Q) *What changes, if any, to the U.S. tax code do you support and why?*

A) I recently co-sponsored the Seniors’ Tax Simplification Act, a bi-partisan bill designed to make filing easier for older Americans to file their taxes quickly and efficiently. I also support general efforts to simplify our tax code and close loopholes.

Q) *What are the most important actions Congress can take to ensure the solvency of Social Security?*

A) Trustees project that the combined Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance trust funds will be exhausted in 2033. Even after 2033 — if policymakers did nothing — the program could still pay three-quarters of scheduled benefits from its incoming tax revenues.

Nevertheless, any cuts to Social Security will still have an indelible impact on the average American. The Disability Insurance (DI) trust fund is projected to be depleted by late 2016. Congress must act before then, ideally by boosting the DI share of Social Security’s payroll tax, as it has done many times in the past, on a bipartisan basis. Unless Congress acts soon to [replenish](http://www.offthechartsblog.org/the-disability-insurance-non-crisis/) the DI trust fund, beneficiaries will face a 20 percent benefit cut.  Such a cut to DI’s already modest benefits ($1,165 monthly, on average) would be devastating.

Q) *Do you support a “risk fee” on big banks? Why or why not?*

A) I have consistently been supportive of mechanisms in place to prevent banks from assuming too much risk, so that they do not become “too big too fail.” That is why I have consistently championed the Dodd-Frank Act. There are good and bad actors, which is why I do not support blanket approaches to addressing issues.

**Health care:**

Q) *Should Obamacare be overturned, left intact, or changed — and if so how?*

A) I believe that the Affordable Care Act should be left intact. It has been an important tool in providing coverage to millions of uninsured Americans around the country. Certainly, there are aspects of the Act that need to be fine-tuned. As such, I am willing to improve upon the Act in a way that protects its integrity, while addressing some of the unintended issues that arose after its implementation.

Q) *Do you favor stripping federal funds from Planned Parenthood? Why or why not?*

A) I do not favor stripping federal funds from Planned Parenthood.

**Immigration:**

Q) *President Obama used his executive powers to prevent the deportation of "DREAMers—youths who came to the U.S. illegally as children with their parents. Would you support legislation to prevent DREAMer deportations? Do you support putting DREAMers on a path to citizenship?*

A) I would support legislation to prevent the deportation of DREAMers and that would place them on a path to citizenship.

**Education:**

Q) *What congressional reforms do you favor to address America’s student loan crisis?*

A) It is essential that we make college more affordable, and that students avoid incurring excessive amounts of debt or interest fees. As such, I support many of the President’s initiatives to ensure that federal direct student loans remain affordable, including capping loan payments at 10% of their incomes, as well strengthening financial incentives to help borrowers repay their loans on time, and lower payments for servicers when loans enter delinquency or default. I also believe that we should make more federal loans available for two-year post-secondary educational institutions, as they are increasingly well-suited for training students for certain categories of well-paying STEM careers that do not require a four-year university.