Q) Do you support installing disinfection technology at Stickney, the world’s largest wastewater treatment plant?

A) At some point in time we may move ahead with disinfection at Stickney, and I would fully support it in the future. In the meantime, the MWRD is excited to be opening the disinfection facility at the O’Brien Water Reclamation Plant this year, and we are proud of our new disinfection facility at the Calumet Water Reclamation Plant. At this time, our capital program is investing in flood mitigation for the community. Additionally, water quality improvements aimed at nutrients are a hot button issue today, so the MWRD is spending money on this effort. We have limited resources and must spend our funds on initiatives that provide the best environment benefit.

Q) How would you improve the current phosphorus-removal plans underway at the MWRD? Do you think this important? If so, why?

A) The MWRD will be removing phosphorus with cutting edge technology at six of our seven plants. As mentioned above, a major portion of our capital program is devoted to this important issue at this time. Currently we are moving forward on biological phosphorus removal. We are also working on algae removal efforts that will reduce phosphorus and nitrogen, another important nutrient to remove. At the same time we are removing carbon from the air.

Q) Do you support any alternatives to maximize the capacity of the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan? Which ones do you support?

A) Flooding is the number one issue facing Cook County residents, and TARP is a cornerstone of our efforts to mitigate flooding and improve water quality. The MWRD recently added 7.9 billion gallons at the Thornton Reservoir and will add 3.5 billion gallons more in capacity in 2017 at the McCook Reservoir. However, in our fight against flooding, this isn’t enough. We’re working on green infrastructure initiatives and putting in systems that can prevent localized flooding in 125 communities.

Q) What do you think the MWRD’s role should be in reducing chloride usage?

A) Twelve months ago the IL EPA approached the MWRD and asked if we would lead the effort to coordinate our country’s fight against chlorides in the waterways. The MWRD responded with a resounding yes, and we are taking a leadership role to convene and lead a working group to address regional chloride issues over the next three years. We are working to develop and implement best management practices to address chloride issues. By reducing salt use or seeking alternative remedies, we are protecting our water environment and making our communities a healthier place to live in the long run. In the meantime, we must strike a balance to ensure drivers have access to safe roads in the winter.

Q) What should the MWRD’s role be in reducing combined sewer overflows? What is the MWRD’s role in informing the public about CSO’s? How would rate the MWRD’s performance in informing the public about CSO’s, and why?

A) The MWRD plays a lead role in reducing CSOs. TARP is significantly larger than any other public works project pertaining to CSOs and is a model throughout the world. Last year, representatives from London and Singapore came to tour TARP as a model to address CSOs in their cities. TARP was envisioned by the MWRD in 1968, four years before the USEPA even existed. The MWRD recognized then, as it does now, the need to clean up rivers and reduce CSOs. We continue to press on to complete that project. It’s an exceptional project and has already removed pollution from our waterways. When completed TARP will eliminate CSOs in most rain events.

We provide real time access to anyone who wants to be notified about CSOs via email or text. They can visit our website to see which portions of the river system are impacted. We can always do more but I believe we have one of the best programs in the Great Lakes Region.

Q) How do you the see role of wastewater treatment agencies changing over the next 10 years?

A) Wastewater treatment agencies are evolving. They are pioneering new technologies and cutting-edge practices to manage valuable resources, spur economic development, create jobs, and improve the environment and public health. We can no longer look at sewage as a waste product, but instead, it is a collection of resources that needs to be recovered and reused. We are looking for potential sources of renewable energy, finding ways to reduce our carbon footprint, and recovering valuable raw materials. My goal is for Chicago to lead in this effort.

Q) Should the MWRD set a goal of making Chicago area waterways clean enough for swimming?

A) Yes. While water quality has dramatically improved over the past 40 years, we are continually working toward making the Chicago area waterways clean enough for swimming.

Q) What should the MWRD’s role be in addressing Asian carp and other invasive species in Chicago area waterways?

A) The Board directed our executive director to take a leadership role in looking for answers and solutions to this issue to protect the waterways against native species while at the same time proving flood protection for the residents of Cook County and protecting water quality. These three factors must be addressed within any plan.

Q) The MWRD is Cook County’s second largest landowner. Does the District have a responsibility to ensure companies to which it leases land are good environmental stewards?

A) The MWRD’s real estate program has a strong commitment to the environmental integrity of land. Contracts require that certain environmental conditions be met with periodic environmental assessments to ensure tenants are being responsible in taking care of the land and waterways. We want environmentally responsible tenants that deliver value for the residents in communities. Whether that’s an environmentally responsible industry or whether we’re proving a park for outdoor access, we have a strong commitment to the environment to ensure the land remains sound.

Q) How would you rate the current performance of the District?

A) Over the past several years the MWRD has made a concerted effort to put itself in the front of environmental issues. We still have a lot of work to do, so that’s why I’m running for Commissioner again so I can see the initiatives continue that make our region better.

Q) What should the District’s role be in coordinating efforts with other government agencies in the Chicago area watersheds to manage those watersheds?

A) The MWRD is an environmental leader locally, throughout the state and nationwide. One of the most important changes at the MWRD is having partnerships throughout Cook County. With programs like the Space to Grow initiative that transform schoolyards into an oasis where children will grow and learn while providing stormwater benefits, in addition to the many intergovernmental agreements we are signing to manage stormwater throughout Cook County. Organizations must work together to build a resilient Chicago. These are all important relationships. No agency can solve the flooding problem alone.