**Name:** Steve Caramelli

**District running for:** 22nd District, Illinois Senate

**Political party:** Democrat

**Political/civic background:**

**Occupation:**

**Education:**

**Campaign website:** <http://caramelliforillinois.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. Illinois’ budget problems are serious, long-term and threatening our state’s economy and our future. The longer we wait to address them in a comprehensive way, the more uncertainty and pain we create for working families and those who need state support the most. I agree with our leaders in Springfield who support a balanced approach to solving our budget problem. I support a progressive income tax as one way to provide a fair solution, by ensuring those who can afford it pay a little more to end the uncertainty and pain that is crippling our neediest and our state.

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) We clearly need to do more to stabilize our pension systems and reduce our crushing debt. But, as the son of two laborers who stood for the values of working families, I believe the previous attempts at pension reform put the burden of a solution on the backs of the very people the system was created to support – even after these people have paid their fair share to provide for a protected, stable and reasonable retirement. We should look at more balanced approaches, including increased revenue and changing the pension payment schedule, to ease our pension burden and ensure we keep our promises to the working people we ask to serve the public.

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) Our current system for developing an annual state budget is clearly broken, as we have gone more than six months without a full-year spending plan. As state senator, my top priority would be to reach agreement each spring on a budget that puts working families first and protects vital state programs and services for those who need them most. I would strongly consider any change to our current budgeting process that would meet those goals.

**Education:**

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

A) Much like our budget process, our system for funding schools is broken – we don’t invest enough at the state level in the education of our future leaders, and what we do invest isn’t spent equitably. I applaud the determined efforts of some of our leaders in Springfield to find a way to reduce our heavy property tax burden for funding schools. While I cannot support a solution that pulls investment away from schools in the 22nd Senate District, I will advocate for a comprehensive discussion about school funding and push for both providing new revenue and restructuring how the money is provided to give all Illinois children the education they need to succeed.

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) Years ago, lawmakers worked out an agreement that included the Chicago teacher pension pickup in the restructuring of school funding. I believe we need to put all options on the table for school funding reform, with my priorities being to provide more funding for all schools, make sure the money is spent to give all children a top-notch education and protect the investment workers make for a secure, modest retirement.

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) It’s truly a shame we have no budget for this year yet, and the state is withholding hundreds of millions of dollars that will support MAP grants and other aid to provide the much-needed education for our college students. I will work in Springfield to ensure we never again have a repeat of a budget stalemate that puts higher education funding in jeopardy, and push for a real discussion of solutions to invest in our colleges and universities. They can’t compete to provide a meaningful education for students around the world if they don’t know tomorrow what funding they will have to provide that education.

**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) For too long, Illinois has tried to do too much for too little. We see it today on every bump road we travel, or on every creaky or cracked bridge we cross uneasily, or when we sit in traffic in the suburbs for hours because of congestion. What we’ve seen with our pension system is when we skip on paying what we owe, it doesn’t go away – it just gets bigger and harder to deal with. I’m hoping to work with Democrats and Republicans in Springfield to provide more money for our infrastructure. We need to figure out the best way to pay for the investment, but the longer we let it go, the more it’s going to cost us and our economy.

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) Yes, we should have a comprehensive solution for funding transportation in Illinois that not only will help pay for the day-to-day, year-to-year operations, but also infuse cash to fix roads, bridges and transit systems in disrepair and expand them to meet the ongoing demands, particularly as we grow in suburban Cook and Kane counties.

**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) My parents proudly worked for a candy manufacturer for many years. My friends and neighbors and their families have a proud tradition of working in the factories that dot Chicagoland. It’s disheartening to see these economic engines close shop and lay off the dedicated workers for moves out of Illinois. I want to bring manufacturing and other jobs and economic opportunities back to Illinois by restoring sanity and balance to our state budget, investing in our schools and higher education to provide the workforce that will drive business growth and improving our infrastructure so manufacturers can more easily and reliably get their goods and products to markets here and around the world.

**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 fully support strengthening our current energy efficiency and renewable energy laws to put us on track to meet and exceed EPA’s carbon pollution standards.

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 also fully support lowering electricity costs for consumers and working to generate good paying jobs in Illinois that can’t be outsourced. I will work with Sierra Club and all stakeholders to ensure that energy efficiency and consumers are top priority.

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 support environmentally friendly energy policies and making progress toward cleaner, smarter options for consumers without putting everyone out of business. And yes, I would consider to support an effort to price carbon, depending upon the details of the proposal.

**Gun safety:**

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

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

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

A) (All three answers are as follows). As an active law enforcement officer, we are well-trained to respect firearms and use them responsibly. I am a supporter of the Second Amendment and believe in the citizens’ rights to own and use firearms. But I am very mindful of the tragedies of gun violence – on the streets of Chicago, in classrooms, at senior citizens and places of worship. We have to do more to provide mental health services for our citizens because too often, those who are untreated harm and kill innocent people. As a legislator, I will weigh all gun issues that come before me carefully to put public safety first while respecting gun owners’ constitutional rights.

**Criminal justice:**

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

A) There are many proposals being discussed and I am open to more transparency but we must protect the personal information of police officers and their families.

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) As a law enforcement officer, I take very seriously my pledge to protect and serve the public. A key role for law enforcement officers is pursuing those who commit criminal acts to ensure the laws created to protect the public are followed. As a legislator, we clearly are not doing enough in Springfield to ensure our prisons have the capacity to support the people who are being caught breaking our laws and incarcerated. I want to work with legislators of both parties and the governor to review our criminal laws, particularly how we provide punishments for low-level, non-violent drug offenses and how we handle inmates as they age, to ensure we have the proper balance of punishment and rehabilitation for those who break the law.

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) I have seen many offenders who have turned their lives around after breaking the law, and I believe second chances are important. But I also believe every case is different, and each needs to be handled carefully. I would not support automatic expungement for every crime but would support providing judges more discretion to review cases and order expungement for those who show they have changed.

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) Any decisions about closing, expanding or adding prison facilities need to be made in coordination with a systemic review of our criminal justice system and made deliberately to weigh the costs of incarceration with the important public safety and public interest questions.

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) No, I am against any proposal to reform juvenile offenders on the state’s sex offender registry. I am also against any reforms to the current law of adult sex offenders on the state registry.

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

A) I do not support a form of merit selection, because it would create a lack of diversity of judges.

**Other:**

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

A) I am a public servant, not a politician, and I am running for the Illinois Senate to be a voice for the citizens. I support changing the way we draw our legislative districts because the current system has produced too many politicians who want a career in Springfield, rather than working for the people who sent them there.

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

A) A number of proposals are being discussed and I would like to have more information before making any decision.

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

A) I am a strong believer in giving voters more power to guide our decisions in the Legislature. The more we can get voters to the polls, the more likely we will be to elect legislators in touch with their districts’ needs. And if we can get more voters to the polls by making it possible for them to automatically be registered to vote, I’m all for it.

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) The most important teacher in my life was from high school, who taught business administration. This teacher had dual roles not only teaching in the classroom but also as the offensive coach for the varsity football team. While on the field he would always express how important it was to work as hard as you can, while in practice and in the game to ensure you left everything on the field.  He took the same approach in the classroom to ensure we tried our very best to succeed.  This valuable lesson I have carried throughout my life making sure I give one hundred percent in everything I do with the possibility that I may get one chance.