**Name:** Raja Krishnamoorthi **District running for:** Illinois’ 8th Congressional District

**Political/civic background:** Issues director to then-U.S. Senate candidate Barack Obama; Member of Board of Illinois Housing Development Authority, Chair of Audit Committee; Special Assistant Attorney General, Public Integrity Unit for State of Illinois; Vice-Chair of Illinois Innovation Council; Deputy Treasurer of Illinois; Co-founder of InSPIRE, a non-profit organization encouraging inner-city children and Illinois veterans to pursue careers in solar technology; past Democratic candidate for Illinois Comptroller and U.S. Congress.

**Occupation:** Small businessman **Education:** B.S.E., Mechanical Engineering, Princeton; J.D., Harvard **Campaign website:** www.rajaforcongress.com

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

**Legislative priorities:**

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

1. For generations, the strength of American democracy has rested on a strong middle- class, but growing income inequality threatens that bedrock of our democracy. We must act to strengthen our middle-class and give more Americans the opportunity to achieve and retain that status. In this campaign, I have proposed a “Working Families Agenda” that includes policies such as raising the federal minimum wage, guaranteeing access to paid maternity and sick leave, providing overtime protections to those earning less than $50,000, and mandating equal pay for equal work for the millions of women in our national workforce.

2. The epidemic of gun violence is a threat to the public health of our nation. We need Members of Congress who are willing to stand up to special interests and put the safety of our families and communities first. My agenda for common-sense gun laws includes: (i) expanding background checks to all gun sales (thus closing the gun-show and terrorist watch list loopholes); (ii) building a better information system on those who should be blocked from weapons purchases including convicted criminals, suspected terrorists, those subject to orders of protection, and those with mental health issues; (iii) reinstating

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the ban on semi-automatic weapons with no civilian or hunting purposes; and (iv) ending the ban on research into gun safety and gun violence.

3. Social Security and Medicare are not just successful federal programs that have lifted millions of U.S. citizens out of poverty. They are also a sacred promise to our senior citizens who paid into these programs for decades and deserve the dignity of financial security in their golden years. As a Member of Congress, I will work to protect and strengthen these programs and fight plans to cut or privatize those benefits, which would put millions at risk. A first step in extending the solvency of Social Security would be to raise the current income cap of $118,500 for payroll taxes paid into the Trust Fund. Similarly, allowing the federal government to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies would save billions of dollars in Medicare costs. The Veterans Administration has used that leverage to negotiate lower drug prices for our nation’s veterans, and there’s no justifiable reason for Congress to prevent the Medicare program from doing the same.

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

A) 1. The 8th Congressional District is made up of many Chicago suburbs, and transportation is a key concern. Many of its residents not only commute to jobs in the city, but also commute to other suburbs for their jobs. Neither our current highways nor our public transit systems are up to the task. That’s why I have proposed a Federal Infrastructure Bank, financed by repealing an unneeded tax break for big oil companies, which would help finance important infrastructure projects across the U.S. In the 8th District, two such projects would be expediting the completion of the long-delayed Elgin-O’Hare highway extension and starting work on the Metra STAR line that would provide commuters with rail service between many of Chicago’s suburbs. Not only would these projects reduce congestion that affects productivity and quality-of-life in our suburbs, they would also produce thousands of good-paying construction jobs.

2. Many families in the 8th Congressional District are struggling with the cost of paying for college. Yet, they recognize that post-secondary education or training is increasingly essential for success in today’s knowledge-driven economy. Congress can take a number of steps to make a college education more affordable for middle-class families while ensuring that college graduates aren’t buried under a pile of debt. My four-point plan includes: a new Opportunity Tax Credit that allows families with up to $200,000 in annual income to claim a total of $15,000 in tax credits per student; increasing the maximum Pell Grant by about 75 percent -- paid for by cutting unnecessary military programs such as littoral combat ships and the Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft; creating a 401(k)-style plan whereby employers match employee payments on student debt, with contributions exempted from income and payroll taxes; and stream-lining the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) form through the use of prior-year data already available to the IRS,

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which would eliminate many questions on the application and allow students to more easily access financial aid.

3. As with most American families these days, most families in the 8th District consist of two working parents. Yet, our laws and policies in this country haven’t kept up with that reality. This is reducing incomes and opportunities for thousands of families. It also creates a tremendous burden for one-parent families, most often headed by women. In this campaign, I have proposed a “Working Families Agenda” to address some of these challenges. It includes: raising the federal minimum wage to $10.10 an hour and linking future increases to inflation; enacting into law President Obama’s executive order that workers earning less than $50,000 automatically qualify for overtime pay; requiring paid maternity leave for all women in the workforce; and expanding the federal child tax credit to help working families with the cost of raising children.

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

A) Both of my opponents in the Democratic primary have served in public office. But neither of them possesses the broad range of experiences in the public and private sector and ideas that I would bring to the U.S. Congress. Deb Bullwinkel has served as a village trustee and mayor. Mike Noland has served for 8 years in Springfield, while our state debt has grown and state government has become paralyzed by partisanship. I believe I can offer voters a better choice.

I have spent a number of years in public service, compiling a record of reform and integrity. I served as issues director for Barack Obama’s underdog 2004 campaign for the U.S. Senate, in which he defeated the party favorite (Dan Hynes) and a free-spending millionaire (Blair Hull) largely on the strength of his record and ideas. I was humbled when Attorney General Lisa Madigan chose me to serve as a Special Assistant Attorney General in the newly created Public Integrity Unit to root out fraud and corruption perpetrated against Illinois taxpayers. Similarly, I was honored to be appointed to the Illinois Housing Development Authority, and to chair its Audit Committee. And Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias chose me to serve as Deputy Treasurer, where I reformed the state’s unclaimed assets program and returned millions of dollars to Illinois residents more effectively and efficiently. Most recently, I served as Vice-Chair of the Illinois Innovation Council, which is helping to revitalize our state’s high-tech sector through, for instance, supporting and nurturing 1871, a high-tech incubator.

For the past six years, I have worked in the private sector as the president of two suburban small businesses in the semiconductor and clean energy sectors. In that capacity, I have witnessed firsthand how the government can help or hurt small businesses through its tax, regulatory and contracting policies. I have seen the challenges facing today’s workforce, such as those created by global competition, the changing economy, and by family demands. And I have sought to expand opportunities in high- tech fields to children and veterans who lack access by establishing a non-profit organization called InSPIRE.

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I am eager to take this knowledge and experience to Congress, where I will work tirelessly to promote policies that will create opportunity for all our people and make our country stronger and more competitive. As in all my previous endeavors, I will look to cooperate and compromise with those on the other side of the aisle while remaining steadfast in upholding the progressive principles in which I believe. Most of all, I will fight to keep our country a beacon of hope and opportunity for people from around the world – like my parents, who came here in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their children. I’ve lived the American Dream. Now I’m determined to keep it alive.

**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) Yes, we will routinely share my public schedules as both candidate and Member of Congress. We fully comply with all financial disclosure requirements as required by law, and will be happy to share those with the press and public as soon as they are filed.

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) We need tougher enforcement of visa restrictions and more sharing of intelligence information with allies and others to prevent ISIS attacks on our nation’s soil and against our interests. Further, in concert with allies and others, we need to support anti-ISIS military action while working for diplomatic solutions in the Middle East.

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

A) No one should be denied entrance to the United States because of their religion. This would violate the founding principles of this nation and send a deeply alienating message to billions of Muslims who bear our country no ill-will. Already, in Somalia, the al- Shabab terrorist organization’s recruitment videos have used footage of Donald Trump calling for a ban on Muslim admissions to the United States in its recruitment videos.

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Q)

A) I have serious concerns about this legislation. There is already an extremely strict vetting process for refugees entering the United States. We must always secure our homeland while offering aid to people fleeing from war and persecution.

Q)

A) Long-term, the international community must work to restore peace and security in Syria. In the 1990s, no-fly zones were imposed over Shia and Kurdish areas of Iraq with broad international support. I would support such a no-fly zone in Syria as part of a similar international effort if a political solution cannot be reached soon between the Assad regime and the various rebel groups throughout Syria. I would support similar, cooperative efforts to establish humanitarian safe zones.

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 panel should either be given a short deadline to complete its work or simply be dissolved immediately. Republicans in Congress, including the House Majority Leader, have said publicly that the committee’s task is to undermine Hillary Clinton’s political prospects. That is a job for paid Republican operatives, not a taxpayer-supported government institution. It is perhaps the best example of the hyper-partisanship in a Congress that has lost the country’s confidence and respect.

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) We need a balance between intelligence operations and protecting the privacy and civil liberties of U.S. citizens. I am opposed to broad-brush government access to all communications, but would support narrowed access under court order when there is sufficient evidence of possible terrorist activity.

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

A) Guantanamo’s continued existence hurts our reputation in the world and provides unnecessary propaganda for our enemies, thus further eroding our national security. As

*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.*



*Do you support a Syrian no-fly zone or the U.S. enforcement of Syrian humanitarian*



*safe zones? Why or why not?*

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many prisoners as possible should be repatriated to their home countries or Middle East allies who will incarcerate them. For the handful who cannot be repatriated, the government should carefully consider incarceration in federal maximum security prisons currently holding the most dangerous criminals such as domestic terrorists.

**Gun violence:**

Q)

A) Closing the gun-show loophole and subjecting all private sales of guns to background checks would be the most important step to take immediately. It is estimated that 40 percent of current gun sales occur at gun shows or through private sales, and many of the guns used in crimes and gang violence are procured in these ways. The vast majority of Americans believe that all gun purchases should be subject to background checks. Congress’s continued refusal to require such policies shows that too many members are putting anti-gun control interests ahead of the safety and security of the people and communities they represent.

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

A) Yes, I support this bill. According to the Government Accountability Office, 2,000 people on the FBI’s terrorist watch list have purchased firearms over the past 11 years. Allowing these people to purchase deadly weapons is incredibly reckless. Obviously there is no measure that can prevent all terrorist violence, but the legislation above would be a good start.

**Climate change:**

Q)

A) Yes, there absolutely is scientific evidence for climate change, and that it is caused by human activity. If followed, the Paris climate change agreement can have a meaningful and positive impact in combating climate change. However, presidential actions will not be enough to meet the targets set in Paris. Congress needs to act aggressively to promote clean energy. For example, I supported Congress’s recent decision to extend the Investment Tax Credit for renewable energy, and I support President Obama’s recent actions to restrict the mining of coal on federal lands. As a small businessman in the solar energy sector, I can personally attest to how an alternative energy future holds the promise of a cleaner environment and a more prosperous future as well.



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



*violence?*



*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?*

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**Economy:**

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

A) In order to raise sufficient revenue for the federal government and bring more fairness to the tax code, we need to plug loopholes in the tax code. For starters, we should end loopholes that only the wealthiest can exploit, thus reducing their effective tax rate, while others see their rates effectively rise. One example is the carried interest loophole.

The corporate tax code deserves intense scrutiny. Currently, it is full of loopholes that only benefit certain large, powerful companies that lobbied for their creation, while putting small businesses on an unfair playing field relative to their larger competitors. In addition, many corporations continue to shelter profits overseas. We need to eliminate loopholes to put all companies on a level playing field, and find a way in which corporate profits can be repatriated, while not creating another government giveaway to special interests.

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A) As mentioned above, Congress should raise the cap on incomes subject to payroll tax. This is a commonsense way to keep the promises made to present and future retirees and keep Social Security strong.

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

A) I would consider supporting a fee on big banks to pay for the regulation and oversight required to prevent future speculative gambling on risky investments that resulted in the Great Recession, costing millions of jobs and billions of dollars in lost savings.

**Health care:**

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

A) The Affordable Care Act has extended health insurance coverage to millions of previously uninsured people. Measures such as Medicaid expansion and subsidies will, in the long term, help to strengthen and broaden the middle class. However, insurance premiums are still too high for too many people; many patients cannot afford the medicines they need; and health care providers are being squeezed. New measures against price-gouging by pharmaceutical companies are needed – especially for generic and ‘orphan’ drugs. Furthermore, the government should be allowed to negotiate drug prices under Medicare Part D in order to make those medicines more affordable, and



*What are the most important actions Congress can take to ensure the solvency of*



*Social Security?*

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reduce the overall cost of healthcare. Finally, we need continued and vigorous oversight of insurance companies to ensure that affordable and comprehensive insurance plans are available to individuals and small businesses.

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

A) Planned Parenthood is a vital provider of health services to women. In many cases, it is the only option available for indigent women who depend on it for their health care. I strongly oppose stripping federal funds from Planned Parenthood.

**Immigration:**

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A) I support a path to citizenship for law-abiding undocumented immigrants, especially the DREAMers whose decision to come to this country was out of their own hands, and many of whom have meaningfully contributed to America especially through service in the Armed Forces. Deportations should be limited to those who have willfully violated our laws. It should not be used against young people who are attending school or pursuing careers in the only country that many of them have ever called home.

**Education:**

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

A) First off, we need to improve other forms of aid besides student loans, which is why I support an opportunity tax credit for middle-class families, and expanding Pell Grants. That said, I would support a combination of employer-assisted repayment policies, refinancing opportunities, loan forgiveness programs for graduates working in public service, and changes to student loans that make refinancing possible.