**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Doris Lewis Brooks

Ward: 21st Ward

Occupation: Retired

Education: Some College

Previous political and civic experience:

I am a member of the Wendell Green Elementary School Local School Council; I successfully lobbied for Juneteenth Day (the day that celebrates the emancipation of American slaves) in 2001, which was recognized by the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois. I was a member of the media during the Democratic Convention and was media advisor during the 1990 aldermanic election and was a volunteer during the 2004 aldermanic election in the 21st ward.

**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?

Yes or No: **No**

Please Explain:

It is inevitable that due to higher costs of medical care and other increases in costs, longevity of retirees, and the bottom line of corporation, it may become necessary for newer employees to increase their share of pension and health care contributions but not reduce benefits.

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 would not support a property tax increase at this time. Property tax increases would further undermine the earning power of the middle class. I would support TIF reform.

**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?

Again, a TIF law reform to include a cap on TIF surplus and reducing the TIF exclusion from the general tax fund from 23 years to 15 years.

**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

Yes or No: Yes

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

Yes or No: No

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain your views, if you wish, on any of these three revenue-generating measures.

Tax on non-Chicago residents may generate enough of a backlash that companies located in Chicago may relocate to the suburbs. Suburbs may in turn tax Chicago residents working in their respective suburbs.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

I support strict gun laws that prevent guns from being transported from out of state. I support providing education to potential gun owners, but harsh penalties to gun law violators. Combating crime should be the main objective of expanding educational and employment opportunities. Studies have shown that jobs provided to people with livable wages have a direct proportion on the decrease of crime. I believe that no matter how many gun laws and crime prevention programs are put in place, we still need more police officers to enforce them.

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

I support stricter laws preventing the import and sale of guns from outside of Illinois. There is more of an effort to prevent illegal fireworks from being brought across the Illinois/Indiana border than preventing guns from being brought across borders.

**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?

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

I believe that a school board by appointment gives the appointer too much control over policy and decision making. In the best interest of the public, school board members should operate as independently as possible.

**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?

Yes or No: No

I support adjusting the set-aside for TIF surplus to cap at $500 million. I support the lowering of the set-aside time from 23 to 15 years.

What reforms would you propose for the city's TIF program?

The TIF program should be reviewed by an independent oversight committee to ensure that the location of TIF districts, amount available for distribution, degree of blight in a potential TIF district, and overall justification is addressed.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

Make our ward employer-friendly; improve appearances by hiring our youth to clean the streets, vacant lots, and other visible areas of the ward. Partner with sports, entertainers, business and clergy to create a pool for empowering entrepreneurs to open franchises and independent businesses.

**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?

There should be 60 aldermen because of the vast diversity/makeup of the ward but the salaries should be lowered. Issues of these days and times are numerous and complex for one alderman to represent up to 50,000 constituents.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes

Please explain:

We are losing millions of dollars to our collar states that have legalized gaming. They are not going to repeal their gaming laws because their economy is already dependent on it. We need to stop treating this casino issue like a political football.

**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?

Yes or No: No

Please explain:

I do not support Chicago’s present traffic light program. I believe that the red light and speed cameras are designed to gain the city’s revenue as opposed to making the streets safe for pedestrians. Studies have shown that front to side accidents may have decreased but rear end collisions have increased.

**11) Ward issues**

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

Businesses – as they relate to living wage jobs, thus crime reduction.

Seniors – many seniors are still caught between buying medicine and food.

City Services – basic services such as street/pothole repair, garbage and vacant lot cleanup, illegal dumping, need to be addressed.