**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: **Gilbert Villegas**

Ward: **36th Ward**

Occupation: **Small business owner (Government Affairs and Business Development)**

Education: **Attended Northeastern University**

Previous political and civic experience: **In the 36th Ward, I serve on the Steinmetz College Preparatory Local School Council in addition to the Advisory Councils for Shabbona Park and Bell Park. I also serve on the boards of a number of local non-profits including the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation, Elite Veteran Owned Business Network and All Chicago.**

**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: **I believe that we need to stand by the promises we have made to our police and firefighters. Yes, we will need to make difficult choices to make this happen, but we need to ensure the livelihoods of our frontline workers. The only way the city will recruit the best workers in the future is to stand by the promises we have made in the past.**

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 do not believe that raising the property tax is the right way to increase revenue. Rather, I think we should look to increase the city’s share of the income tax as well as work with Springfield to pass the Fair Tax bill that has been stalled for years. Working with Springfield to make these things happen may be difficult, but they would reduce the tax burden for most Chicagoans while putting us on strong footing for the long run.**

**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?

**Similar to balancing the books for the Police and Firefighters pensions, I believe we must work with Springfield to ensure that long-term solutions will stick. Raising property taxes would increase inequality in our city and it would not solve the pension crisis for the long term. We need to look at long-term solutions to make sure the city avoids more pension crises in the future.**

**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: **No**

\* 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: **No**

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

**All of these new taxes discourage business growth in Chicago, and we need to increase business development in the city, not discourage it. That is why I support the Fair Tax as well as increasing Chicago’s share of the income tax, those are two measures that would increase both revenue and equality.**

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: **Yes**

Please explain:

**There is no question that the 36th Ward needs more police officers than we currently see. Public safety is a top issue here in the Ward and even a few more officers would be a step in the right direction.**

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

**I would carefully consider any and all legislation to stem the flow of illegal guns into Chicago. We need to work with not only Springfield however. We need to work with our friends in Wisconsin, Indiana and the collar counties to make sure we can solve this serious problem once and for all.**

**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 support anything that increases Democracy in Chicago and an elected school board would certainly increase Democracy. We must be careful however, Chicago cannot afford any additional corruption and an elected school board could potentially increase corruption.**

**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: **Yes**

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

**TIFs need to be discussed openly and honestly. TIFs have proven to be successful in aiding economic development. They have also been proven to increase inequality in an already divided city. With more public oversight I think TIFs can be used to improve both our neighborhoods and our schools.**

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

**The newly drawn 36th Ward is full of opportunity to grow and prosper, and this is why I will focus heavily on economic development. The first step is to have strong working relationships with both business owners and unions. The 36th Ward is full of proud union members who are ready to do great work for businesses of all shapes and sizes. Participatory Budgeting will play a vital role in the second step, which is to publicize and advertise our great neighborhoods. For example, Hermosa is one of the great neighborhoods in the 36th Ward. Hermosa is a great place to live and work. Its residents are intelligent and hard working people. If you offer them high quality union jobs within the neighborhood, Hermosa and its businesses will thrive.**

**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?

**I believe that the right number of Alderman is 25. We need to make sure that we have enough Aldermen to represent the diverse opinions of our residents, but 50 is a luxury that the taxpayers of Chicago cannot afford.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: **Yes**

Please explain:

**We lose an extraordinary amount of revenue to casinos that are within easy driving distance of the city. Without a doubt there are a lot of downsides to casino gambling, but we need to recognize that the citizens of Chicago (as well as visitors) are already gambling in Casinos, they are just driving outside of the city to do so.**

**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 am not sure about the number of cameras, but they definitely need to be removed in some places and added to others. The residents that I have spoken with overwhelmingly believe that they are a cash grab by the city. I believe they are intended for public safety. These two beliefs must be reconciled. They should be present in front of schools and dangerous intersections, but removed from speed traps. We can build the public’s trust by decreasing automotive fatalities and injuries, but we can lose it just as quickly by giving people steep fines when they were driving safely and responsibly.**

**11) Ward issues**

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

**I am extremely proud of the team of volunteers we have assembled. We have already talked to thousands of voters and three issues arise consistently: public safety, access to neighborhood schools and economic development. None of these are easy issues to deal with, but I believe all three can be addressed. I would like to see more stability in leadership at Police District 25. I will do everything I can as Alderman to bring more teachers and classrooms to the Ward. This endeavor will include CPS, CTU and neighborhood stakeholders, but I believe we must do better for our children. Finally, I will work with residents, unions and business owners to bring more jobs and more businesses to the 36th Ward. I know we can make significant progress on all three fronts in four years and that is why I am ready to be the next Alderman in the 36th Ward.**