**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Emma Mitts

Ward: 37

Occupation: Alderman, 37th Ward

Education:

Civil Rights and academic opportunities have been cornerstones of Emma Mitts’s life. That’s why she was one of the first African Americans to integrate her high school in Arkansas. Emma has since taken classes at University of Arkansas and has attended Triton College.

Previous political and civic experience:

Alderman, 37th Ward

Democratic Committeeman, 37th 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:

**Yes.**

Please Explain:

**The courts have been clear that the only pension reforms allowed are those that have been negotiated with labor unions. I believe that we need to implement new pension reforms but need to do it with all stakeholders at the table.**

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 need to see a specific proposal before committing to a property tax increase. We need to be careful to ensure that any budget fixes do not come at the expense of those who can least afford it. Instead of taxing working families, our City needs to increase the number of taxpayers.**

**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?

**Bringing in new taxpayers is going to be key to solving the pension crisis and solving our budget problems. In the 37th Ward, we took a chance bringing in Wal-Mart. The result has been consistent new development in the area. That is the type of growth we need across the city.**

**I’m open to exploring the possibility of a Chicago-based casino. Many Chicago residents already go to casinos in other states, we should bring that revenue back to Chicago. A land-based Casino would create new jobs and give the city new revenue.**

**I believe that we need to responsibly put our fiscal house in order. The City of Chicago needs to begin to wholly pay off the bond obligations we have so that we can stop paying interest and begin to restore the quality services that we continue to cut. I am open to other new sources of revenue but we need to make sure that these new revenues do not kill jobs in our communities.**

**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:

**Yes.**

\* 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.

Our city is in desperate need of new revenue. We need to continue to expand the number of taxpayers as opposed to deepening taxes on those who can least afford it.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No:

**Yes.**

Please explain:

**Adding more police officers is key to stemming the tide of violence that is plaguing our city.**

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

**I support any legislation that takes an illegal gun off the street.**

**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:

**No.**

Please explain:

**We need to keep politics out of our children’s’ education. Without specifics of an elected school board, I am afraid that we could end up with a system where the Board of Education is comprised of individuals who do not understand or represent the values of our community.**

**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?

We need to reform TIFs to ensure that they are being used for the proper purposes, which are to improve and revitalized communities. I am open to exploring a number of reforms including capping the percentage of the City in TIF districts, and increasing City Council oversight of TIF districts.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

I take a hands-on approach to job creation in the 37th Ward. I believe that our city and state should hire local to ensure that tax revenue is being spent in Chicago companies. When the CTA needed a company to build seats for the new fleet of buses, I was happy to advocate that those jobs be built in Chicago at Friedman Seating.

We should be incentivizing companies to build and open in underserved areas of Chicago to create middle class jobs. That is why I support tax-credits for companies who create local jobs.

**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?

Each ward has approximately 55,000 residents. Without a specific proposal, it is hard to evaluate the benefits of decreasing the number of Aldermen. I believe that the most important role of an Alderman is to provide the quality services that our residents deserve, without more information on the proposal, it is hard to evaluate whether or not an Alderman could meet demands for service.

Low-income areas would be hit especially hard by a reduction in the number of Alderman. We need to ensure that resources are continually flowing to the areas that need them most.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No:

**Yes.**

Please explain:

A casino in Chicago could help the city increase revenue that is currently being spent in other states. It will be important for us to evaluate the effects on the local community but we should consider keeping gambling revenues in Chicago as opposed to letting them go elsewhere.

**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:

Red light and speed cameras lead to disadvantaged individuals paying more fines. We need to make sure that red light and speed cameras are being used for public safety purposes as opposed to being used to generate revenue.

**11) Ward issues**

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

Residents and myself want us to have a safe community with excellent educational choices and new job opportunities.