**Name:** Christian Mitchell

**District running for:** State Representative (IL-26)

**Political party:** Democratic

**Political/civic background:** Former cabinet staffer to Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; campaign aide to Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Alderman Will Burns; senior staff for Obama for America 2012.

**Occupation:** State Representative

**Education:** B.A., Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago

**Campaign website:** www.friendsofchristianmitchell.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.*

A)

**Illinois is facing a serious revenue crisis, in part because of the constitutional restrictions on modernizing the state’s current tax code. I am the chief sponsor of a bill to create a progressive income tax so that lower earners pay lower rates and higher earners pay higher rates. Furthermore, I’ve introduced bills that would add a surcharge to financial services used by high net worth individuals to help cover educational costs and I’ve repeatedly supported closing corporate tax loopholes.**

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)

**It’s important to note that the $100 billion pension crisis Illinois is currently facing is in no way the fault of our hardworking state employees. We arrived here because of decades of neglect from previous General Assemblies and governors who promised pension benefits without paying into the funds.**

**That said, action must be taken immediately to solve this crisis. The actions available to the legislature, however, are limited and likely painful. The courts recently closed the door on any reforms that reduce benefits for current annuitants, which makes it clear the path forward must include creative revenue solutions in order to solve the current unfunded liability. We must also ensure that future pension promises are fair to both our hard working state employees and Illinois taxpayers. There is not a simple solution to this problem.**

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)

**I would like to see more information on this specific proposal, but I have been vocal in my support for a budget agreement that funds public education and vital services like the child care assistance program, in home care for our seniors and the disabled, breast and cervical cancer screenings, and other critical programs.**

**Education:**

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

A)

**Illinois ranks nearly last in the nation when it comes to equitable funding for public education. I have supported and sponsored several critical changes to the way the state funds our schools. I wrote a bill called ‘Fund Education First’ which is a fully funded piece of legislation that would provide CPS an additional $200 million in the first year alone and billions of dollars long term – all without raising property taxes. It would also establish a continuing appropriation so that our kids can’t be held hostage in future budget negotiations. I have also been a strong supporter of education funding reform, because the formula we currently use to fund schools has created a situation where some wealthy suburban school districts are building their second or third Olympic size swimming pools when at the same time there are schools in my district that don’t have enough funding for desks or updated textbooks. Lastly, I strongly support the Speaker’s bill to implement a “Millionaires’ Tax” which would generate $1 billion in education funding for the entire state. To me, education is the civil rights issue of our time. Every child, regardless of his or her ZIP code, must have access to a high quality public education.**

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)

**We need parity in the way we fund the Chicago Teachers Pension Fund and the Teacher Retirement System. Part of my Fund Education First bill included a pension cost shift that was carefully structured to reinvest all savings back into the General State Aid formula which would then be sent to our local schools. Under this proposal, poorer school districts in places like Marion, Alexander, East St. Louis and Cahokia all do better. It’s not just good for Chicago, it’s good for struggling school districts all across Illinois. More state support for public education, including pensions, would go a long way in setting our students and our teachers up for success.**

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)

**We need to start by increasing our funding for the Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grant. Right now, there are graduating high school seniors in every part of the state who could be the next great innovator or entrepreneur, if only they had the financial support they needed to go to the college or university that they’ve already been accepted to. We are doing our state a tremendous disservice by turning our backs on those kids, their talent and their potential.**

**I found it appalling that Governor Rauner proposed a 30% reduction in state spending to our institutions of higher education. I worked to restore those proposed cuts in the higher education budget, but unfortunately that was vetoed by the governor.**

**I agree that we should be seeking out efficiencies in our community colleges and four year institutions, but we must ensure that more resources are making their way to our students in the classroom.**

**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)

**I’m open to any proposal that invests in our infrastructure in a way that helps grow our economy and attract new businesses to the state.**

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.**

**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)

**The top three things we can do to help attract and retain manufacturing jobs in Illinois is invest in public education, align our workforce development initiatives with growth industries, and expand our infrastructure.**

**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)

**Support. I’d like to see some combination of the elements of this bill with elements of the Illinois Clean Jobs bill.**

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 support the Illinois Clean Jobs bill and was a chief sponsor of the bill because of its potential to create 30,000 jobs a year and save consumers roughly $1 billion over the next 15 years by increasing energy efficiency standards while at the same time reducing our carbon emissions.**

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)

**Yes.**

**Gun safety:**

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

A)

**Yes.**

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

A)

**I support state licensing for all firearms dealers. In fact, I introduced House Bill 3422, the Gun Dealer and Ammunition Seller Act, which would tighten regulations and enhance enforcement by creating a state licensure program.**

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

A)

**Support.**

**Criminal justice:**

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

A)

**Support.**

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)

**Our efforts should be focused on reducing the number of non-violent drug offenders, which would have a dramatic impact on the Illinois adult prison population. I was a strong supporter of House Bill 218, which would have decriminalized small amounts of marijuana and reduced penalties on low level drug offenses.**

**The release of aged and disabled prisoners should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In many instances, those prisoners committed very serious crimes including rape or murder, and we need take into consideration the victims and their concerns.**

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)

**The expungement process should be addressed on a case-by-case basis.**

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)

**I’m generally supportive of redirecting criminal justice funding toward restorative programs rather than incarceration, but I would need to see a specific proposal.**

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)

**I support measures that will keep our local residents and our children safe from dangerous sex offenders. If there is a way to do this without compromising the safety of the public, I would be willing to revisit it.**

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

A)

**No.**

**Other:**

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

A)

**No. I have concerns about the current pending constitutional amendment’s compliance with the Voting Rights Act, and its ability to protect both the voting rights and the political representation of minority communities.**

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

A)

**The courts have recently found much of the current tort reform proposal to be unconstitutional. As far as workers’ compensation, I’m open to proposals that help lower the actual employer premiums while at the same time protect our workers from financial ruin should they be hurt on the job. Insurance companies must be willing to come to the table and compromise on this issue.**

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

A)

**Support.**

Q) *What sort of ethics and campaign-funding reforms does the state need?*

A)

**I’m a strong supporter of campaign finance reform, including public financing of elections.**

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)

**Angela Fredriksen – my 10th grade English teacher, because she believed in me when few others did, and taught me how to express myself and the value in doing so.**