**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: **Walter Burnett, Jr.**

Ward: **27**

Occupation: **27th Ward Alderman**

Education: **B.S. Degree, Northeastern Illinois University**

Previous political and civic experience:

**I serve on the board of the following organizations: The United Center Economic Development Board, Leslie’s Place, Harold Washington Advisory Board, CHA Alumni Association, St. Leonard’s Ministries Advisory Board, Family Guidance Centers, Inc. Advisory Board, Deborah’s Place, Haymarket Center Advisory Board, the YMCA Youth and Government Advisory Board, and The Inner Voice, Inc. Burnett is also a member of St. John Masonic Lodge, Shriners, and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, and a former member of the Elks and Near North Kiwanis.**

**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: **It depends.**

Please Explain:

**We are working to find a solution that doesn't disproportionately impact those that rely on the pension system. The search for a solution that is amenable to taxpayers, employees, and government is still ongoing. A big factor is the upcoming Illinois Supreme Court decision on the constitutionality of pension benefit modifications. I hope this court decision will help us move forward with a comprehensive strategy for fixing the problem.**

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 hope the upcoming court decision will help us move forward with a comprehensive strategy for fixing the problem.**

**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?

**I hope the upcoming court decision will help us move forward with a comprehensive strategy for fixing the problem.**

**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: **It depends. I am certainly open to finding progressive ways to increase revenue to the city but I certainly don’t want to discourage trading exchanges in Chicago. I look forward to learn more about the LaSalle Street tax and having a more substantive conversation about it.**

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

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: **Yes.**

Please explain:

**Hire more cops. We have to recognize the lack of resources available to promoting safety. Beyond that, we also need to acknowledge that police cannot do all the work. That’s why I encourage beat police officers and residents to actively develop relationships with each other.**

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

**I support any legislation that will adequately tackle the flow of illegal guns into the city of Chicago.**

**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 make sure our schools are accountable and the voices of parents, students, and the community are heard. I’m not yet convinced that an elected school board is the solution, but I’m open to new ideas.**

**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:

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

**I can’t speak to all the uses of TIF dollars across the city, but in my own ward we used TIF dollars to build elementary and high schools, create a new stop on the CTA Green Line, develop green space, assist existing businesses, and attract new businesses. I solicit input from the residents in my ward on the use of these funds.**

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

**The answer is simple: TIF incentives. These will help bring even more businesses to the 27th Ward and boost economic development.**

**I think maintaining communication between new employers and local residents is a great way to encourage new employers to hire local 27th Ward residents. In the past, we have done this through a number of job fairs. I will to continue this process, and maybe increase the amount of job fairs annually.**

**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?

**My community needs effective representation that only comes from smaller wards. We worked for a long time to be able to participate and have a voice in Chicago government, and I don’t want to give that up just because some people believe it can save a very small fraction of money in our city’s budget. I am still committed to finding other ways to make our government leaner and more efficient, so we can ease the burden on our budget and taxpayers.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: **Yes.**

Please explain:

**Chicago residents already have a casino right on their border. We should come up with an effective and well-planned location for a casino here in our city and create jobs and new revenues. We also must make certain that new revenues are used to better fund schools or public safety.**

**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: **It depends.**

Please explain:

**It depends on the location of the camera and whether or not it will help improve public safety. Above all, I am huge proponent of being fair. I don’t want people running red lights, endangering other drivers and pedestrians, but I also want to be fair.**

**11) Ward issues**

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

**I focus on bringing more economic development, continuing to develop diverse housing, and improving our schools.**