**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: John Kozlar

Ward: 11

Occupation: Student and volunteer President of Little League baseball and softball

Education: Mark Sheridan Academy, Mount Carmel High School, University of Chicago, John Marshall Law School

Previous political and civic experience:

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My first candidacy for public office came in 2011 when I ran for Alderman in Chicago’s 11th Ward, and was just 1,255 votes away from forcing a run-off with current alderman James Balcer. As a lifelong resident of Bridgeport, and being raised in a middle class family, I learned that the best gift of life is to give to others. Over the past six years, I have been a part of the Little League in Canaryville. From my experiences with operating the Little League, I have learned how to: (1) manage a budget of over half a million dollars, (2) conduct ballpark additions totaling over $225,000.00 in renovations, (3) help organize community events and fundraisers, including: Elvis Nights, Local Business Nights, All-Star Days, Wiffle Ball Tournaments, and Opening Day Parades, (4) organize 492 little league boys and girls, including ordering uniforms, trophies, and communicating with parents, coaches, neighbors, and fans, (5) operate a small business-like concession stand with a three month revenue of $50,000, (6) and mostly importantly I learned how working together, with the entire community, results in limitless possibilities for all of our residents.

**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 and Yes

Please Explain:

 We need to protect our pension system that our employees have been paying into. There is no question that our pension system is greatly underfunded, but we have to understand how we got there in order to first identify the core of the problem, and two, come up with a reasonable solution. Year after year our city employees fulfilled their part of the bargain in the sense that they paid into the pension system with money from their paycheck. However the city did not do its part. The elected officials abused and were incompetent in the way they managed the pension system, and destroyed our most valuable revenue generating assets (parking meters and skyways to name just a couple). The result is a 26 Billion plus (and rising) unfunded pension liability, the future of city pensions in limbo, our city on the brink of financial bankruptcy, and a lack of job creation. I am not here to dwell in the past, but am here to now implement solutions. Are these solutions going to be well liked, probably not. But again, the situation we find ourselves in is the result of past incompetence of our elected officials and administrators, so we are left with the “What is” instead of the “What should have been done.” I answered No and Yes above for the following reasons: No we should not restructure the current employee pension system, but yes we should restructure the future employee pension system for any new hiree taking place in 2018. After researching Detroit and its filing for bankruptcy, the amount of funds expended on litigation costs was astronomical. We are not going to accomplish much in the long run if we go to litigation to restructure our pensions for those already retired. Those who are already retired paid their dues in their pay checks for their pensions, and so have the current employees. Therefore, we should abide by securing their pensions as best we can.

Currently, the city’s unfunded pension liability goes up $200,000 every hour. This is a problem. In order to solve this problem, we need to not only stop the negative rate per hour, but we need to reverse the trend if we are going to solve the problem for the upcoming generations. When we solve this problem, we then have the result of more resources available for our city, including more jobs for our citizens. In order to reverse this trend we have to slow unfunded rate down, and we do this by creating new city contracts for new employees. What I mean by this is: If you are hired in 2018 for the first time, you will be put into a 401k styled program instead of a traditional pension program. Would I like the pension system to continue to be offered? Yes, but it is no longer practical and feasible. That is the truth, and if there is anyone who says the opposite, he or she is wrong. The result of the new styled employee retirement program will result in the unfunded pension rate to slow down, but we will still need to create revenue to pay off the current pension program and reverse the trend of depleting our systems. To create revenues, I would suggest the following: (1) not raise any income or property taxes, (2) build Chicago casinos, (3) successfully obtain governmental funding, (4) Build hotels, (5) create more seasonal revenue generating events, and (6) make sure the city gains money from contracts with private companies.

When we implement the above plans, then we will start to make progress with not only our pension system, but the quality of life of our proud city. It will, without question take time, but it will be a step in the positive direction. These ideas will hopefully be the start of a change, and more ways to make our city fiscally stable and responsible will result.

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 have pledged not to support a property tax increase, and identified other ways to obtain revenue for our city above. We, as taxpayers, have had enough of our money being taken away from us. Many of us either have families or have loans to pay off, and for the government, included our local government, to take our hard earned money away from us has to stop. Any property tax increase would run the risk of more people leaving Chicago, not because they want to, but because they can no longer afford to live here. We need to keep the good people in, give our citizens more opportunities to live a good life in Chicago, and secure the future of our 11th Ward and City as a whole. Therefore, I will not support a property tax increase under any circumstances.

**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?

 We need to protect our pension system that our teachers have been paying into. After talking with CPS teachers, families, and students on a first-hand basis, and in learning their concerns, I will be an advocate in city hall for a good quality education. I will not support any more firings of our good teachers, and had enough of leaving our CPS family with uncertainty. I will stand up and make it known that there will be no more school closings, that we need to give our good teachers a sense of security that they will have a job to support their families, that we will welcome and have job openings for new teachers who have earned the qualifications to teach our students, and that our students will be safe as they acquire knowledge. Each and every day there are parents and guardians who have to worry about their young son or daughter going to school and coming home safe. We need to start working with those who are directly involved with our Chicago Public Schools. We need to start listening to our parents, teachers, principals, local school councils, and students. I will support the implementation of an elected Chicago Board of Education, who will work hand in hand with the mayor-selected board members. It’s when we bring everyone together that solutions to our real problems will be thought of and created.

 With our educational finances, we spend over $6 Billion every year in the City of Chicago Budget. This is a lot of money, but I feel it is being misused and not being spent for the well-being of our children. Over the last three years alone, teachers have not only seen cuts in jobs, but they have also seen a cut in resources. It is rare for children in our CPS system to have opportunities to learn how to play a musical instrument or draw as an artist. We need to implement more after school programs, and this I will support. Again, when we start allocating our money back into our schools, we are showing our next generation that they we are investing in their future, and they are worth every penny.

 The same should be for our teachers. I explained above the retirement crisis we find ourselves in, but if we implement these new measures, we will secure and save the retirement of all of our employees, including our teachers.

 Therefore, I will support a comprehensive and transparent budget, and fight for more resources to be put back into our schools.

**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: If the tax is minimal and reasonable, and only if it is minimal and reasonable, I would support it.

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

Yes or No: If the tax is reasonable, and only if it is reasonable, I would support it.

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

I do not support any new taxes for our Chicago residents. If a tax is reasonable for those who live out of the city, then I will take a further look. Again though, I think all of our hard working citizens are paying enough taxes, and I do not support taking more money away from them living a quality life. Also, with our trading exchanges, I do not support a tax deterrence on investments from individuals.

**4) Crime**

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

Yes or No: Yes.

Please explain:

 I am a firm believer that the more police officers we have patrolling our streets and working with community organizations, the better for our 11th Ward and City of Chicago. Also, we need to invest in 21st Century gear for our police officers, so they can be safe and have the upper hand in protecting our residents and neighborhoods.

 We need to have stricter consequences in Chicago for those who commit crimes and use guns for violence. The larger the consequence of jail time and the more we enforce our laws, the less likely people will want to commit crimes. I think it is important that we identify the core issues that come out of our crimes as well. These issues include: parenting, job and education opportunities, and neighborhoods working together with our police and all residents to create a safe environment for our children and families. If we lack within these issues, crime will increase. Furthermore, our CAPS programs are vital to the well-being our community, as the police work directly with the citizens of each district. Therefore, it is important that we are on top of all of these issues, and make sure we fulfill the steps to reduce crime in our city.

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

 I would support increasing the severity of the consequences for those who bring illegal guns into Chicago. The more of a deterrence there is, the less likely one will want to commit the action. Of course there will always be someone trying to break the law, but when they get caught, they will serve the consequence for their own action, and that consequence will have to be actually applied to deter others from doing the same. I will further support a new strategy to keep track of guns in our streets and invest in new technology. With 21st century technology, we will have a system in place to reduce the chances of guns flowing through our neighborhoods without knowing where it came from and who owns it.

**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:

 We need to start listening to our parents, teachers, principals, local school councils, and students. I will support the implementation of an elected Chicago Board of Education, who will work hand in hand with the mayor-selected board members. It’s when we bring everyone together that solutions to our real problems will be thought of and created. An equally represented Board of Education is what our CPS needs, without question.

**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: I only support TIF funds that will be used directly for our schools and directly within our neighborhoods. There has been a lot of abuse of our TIF funds over the years, and the funds rarely are used for our schools and economic developments that impact our neighborhoods directly.

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

 I would propose the following reforms: (1) Transparency from our elected officials, so that we may know exactly where the TIF funds are being spent, (2) that the residents of the ward can have a voice on where they would like the funds to be spent (participatory budgeting), and (3) TIFs can only be spent for economic developments that will benefit the community as a whole. From all of these propositions, we will begin to bring back the true intentions and purposes of Tax Increment Financing, and preserve, advance, and secure our 11th Ward and City of Chicago.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

 I am the only candidate who has publicly pledged and given specifics on economic developments for our 11th Ward. More details can be found on my campaign website at [www.JohnKozlar.com](http://www.JohnKozlar.com), but I will say that the 11th Ward has a lot of potential to be the #1 ward in Chicago and I will not let that potential go to waste. The community deserves our 11th Ward to be a better place, and I will work hard with our residents and bring these economic developments into our neighborhoods. All I ask is that you give me a chance, and I know I will not let you down. I have proposed and will bring the following economic developments to the 11th Ward: (1) Revitalize our Halsted Street and implement a theater district by bringing back the Ramova Theater, (2) a 21st Century Bowling Alley, (3) a state-of-the-art youth sports field, (4) make our community dog friendly by adding two residential dog parks, and (5) build upon the social and local business movement on Morgan Street with expanding the sidewalks and adding artistic lighting to the area.

 When we invest within our ward, there will be more opportunities for our residents and people will want to stay and live in our community. The more jobs there are available, the lower the crime and the better quality of life for our residents. Right now the next generation cannot obtain jobs because our economy has been horrible, which is a direct result of years of neglect by the same politicians, year after year. I’ve had enough of the same old politics as usual and the everyday citizen paying the price because of it.

 These economic developments will attract new businesses to want to come into our community and invest in our area. When these businesses invest in our ward, more jobs become available, and our current businesses will be able to see more consumers in the area, therefore benefitting from the economic uprising. We have many neighborhoods within the 11th Ward that are very supportive, now we just have to have a proactive effort from our elected officials for the betterment of our community. I will implement more communication tools and a system in place to notify our residents of job opportunities, and make the process easier to apply. It is when we implement new ways of living and access to job opportunities, for the betterment of our community, that everyone gets a fair chance.

 Therefore, I will add a new face to our local government, a face that will not be under a microscope with scandals as our ward currently is, a person who cares about the well-being of our residents, and bridge the gap between our elected officials and community. When an Alderman stands up for his or her ward and brings in fresh ideas, more energy, and care, the community as a whole sees improvement. And this is exactly what I pledge to do if elected Alderman.

**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?

 The competency of the Aldermen is very important. If we have 50 Alderman who are honest, care about the well-being of our city and our individual wards, and who do not think of themselves better than the common citizen, then we can be an efficient and effective local government. Each neighborhood within a ward deserves as much attention as possible from an Alderman, so it is important to make sure that we make this possible and to go out and vote.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: Yes, on condition.

Please explain:

 A casino in Chicago will generate revenue, of which the city needs in order to not raise taxes. I would support putting a casino in Chicago, just as long as it not placed in the heart of a neighborhood. This is the reason why I would support a casino near the downtown area, adjacent to the lake.

**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 cameras had the right intention, but have been abused. Speed cameras also have had the right intention, but are now placed all across Chicago to generate revenue for the city. I do not mind the red light cameras in high risk crash sites, and I do not mind speed cameras near schools and park where children and families play, as this will aid in public safety. But to include them all across Chicago, we are becoming involved too much in people’s lives, and a nuisance for non-safety reasons.

**11) Ward issues**

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

* Jobs for our 11th Ward
* Economic Developments for our residents to go shopping and spend time with their family
* Making our ward a safer place

A lot of people living in the 11th Ward have had enough of the same old politics as usual, and want to give someone else a chance to make the 11th Ward a Better Place. I am ready for that change.