**Name: Angelica Alfaro**

**District running for: State Senate District 2**

**Political party: Democrat**

**Political/civic background**: I am a first-time candidate and have volunteered for Democratic campaigns. After graduating from college, I returned to my community where I counseled first-generation college students who lacked the tools and resources to work their way through the application and financial assistance process and then mentored them through their college years. I have also advocated, both personally and professionally, to increase high-quality school options for all students in Chicago.

**Occupation:** I am the Project Coordinator for the Summer of a Lifetime Program at Noble Network of Charter Schools. Many of Noble’s students, like me, are the first in their families to attend college. Through this program, we provide them during the summer break with on-campus enrichment programs that help them see first-hand what a college experience can be. I am a former alum of the program and it made a significant impact on my life in preparing me for college. I was previously the Advocacy Manager at Noble.

**Education:** B.A. from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Campaign website:** www.AngelicaAlfaro.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tax on individuals or corporations, either temporarily or permanently.* **We need an overhaul of our regressive and outdated tax structure. I support a progressive income tax that reduces the tax burden on low- and middle-class families and increases much-needed funding for our schools and other important state programs.**

*2.     Expand the sales tax to services.* **Support for some services, particularly luxury services. This deserves a thoughtful and deliberative process for determining which services should be subject to sales tax.**

*3.     Tax retirement income in excess of $50,000.* **Oppose.**

*4.     Adopt a progressive income tax.* **Support.**

*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)

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) **The Supreme Court ruling on SB1 was clear that public employees are entitled to a pension under the system as it existed when they entered employment. I support a Constitutional Amendment to reconsider this. But right now, as difficult as it will be, we need to look at solutions to pay off our massive unfunded liability and put Illinois back on the path to fiscal stability. New revenue is needed, and we must make sure to raise it in a responsible way that shields families who can least afford it.**

**One change I strongly support that will pass constitutional muster is teacher pension funding equity for Chicago. CPS is the only district in the state that pays its own employer contribution for teacher pensions. I support gradually shifting teacher pension costs to local school districts throughout the state, and a full reinvestment of those funds in General State Aid. The richest school districts in the state get the biggest benefit from the state when it pays everyone’s TRS payments. Not only will this bring us closer to educational funding equity, it also keeps responsibility for end-of-career pay spiking with the board who set those salaries.**

**I also support a change to Tier Two pension benefits, especially for teachers. (By Tier Two, I mean the lower benefit level that teachers hired after 2010 receive.) Right now, teachers pay in more than they will ever get out of the system. It is unconscionable that we are treating our newer teachers this way, and it is another way to discourage people from entering the teaching profession. I support a benefit increase for Tier Two teachers that re-thinks the backloaded defined benefit pension structure and moves toward a cash balance or hybrid model that will be more attractive to people as they consider teaching as a career option. I think this will help recruit more teachers to our public education systems.**

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) **Yes. There are too many egos and too much political maneuvering in the budget debacle in Springfield right now, and the victims are low-income college students who depend on MAP grants, seniors who rely on services to stay independent in their own homes, and others of our most vulnerable populations.**

**Education:**

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

A) **We desperately need an overhaul of our broken public school funding system, which is the most inequitable in the country. Students who need the most resources get the least. Public schools need to be properly funded to ensure that teachers and principals have the resources they need to provide the highest quality of learning to students.**

**First, the teacher pension funding system hurts Chicago students and taxpayers and must be fixed in any funding reform package. Second, too many state funding streams are distributed without regard for how much wealth the district has and how great their student need is. We must better focus our state resources so they are being allocated to close the funding equity gap. And finally, the system is tremendously underfunded. We need an infusion of resources from the State to reduce the over-reliance on property taxes.**

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) **Yes. Chicago taxpayers currently pay pensions for Chicago teachers (through their property taxes) and for teachers outside of Chicago (through their state income taxes). This system is blatantly unfair to Chicagoans.**

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) **The lack of a budget has impacted college students and higher education institutions more than almost any other area of state spending. Expanding access to college is one of my most important priorities. I support an increase in state funding for public higher education. A funding increase in MAP grants remains an even bigger priority. This is one of the most important things we can do to put students on the path for upward mobility and to stop the rising gap in income inequality.**

**The rising cost of tuition cannot be fully attributed to state funding cuts. Increasing administrative salaries and buy-offs are adding fuel to the fire and undermining public support for higher education institutions. We have to stop those rising costs as one tool to making higher education more affordable.**

**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) **It makes sense to fund infrastructure improvements through the gas tax so that those who use the roads and bridges the most are the ones bearing the cost. This is a more logical funding source than the video poker and candy taxes on which the last capitol bill relied. Before committing to any revenue increases for this, I would like to ensure that Chicago gets its proportional share of infrastructure funding when these funds are allocated. Although the state is vast and there are many infrastructure needs, there is much to be done in Chicago and the surrounding areas to improve public transit, boost economic development, and create jobs.**

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. It is short-sighted to ignore capital needs in public transit, which will become all the more important in future years and is an important tool to minimize the impact to the environment. It’s best to plan for these funding needs now and not place unexpected, new financial burdens on future generations.**

**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) **First, despite our jobs loss and high unemployment rate, Illinois actually has a significant number of unfilled skilled labor jobs. This speaks to the disconnect between our education and job sectors. There is a real opportunity to close this gap. Our schools need to better prepare students with the writing, math, and critical thinking skills they need for success in careers in a global economy. We need high-quality schools for every child in every neighborhood. I support creating industry-approved career pathways certifications as an endorsement on high school diplomas. Expanding access for students to earn a career certificate and for employers to have ready-to-hire employees will tell businesses that Illinois is a great place to grow their businesses.**

**Second, Illinois’s high property tax rate drives businesses out of state. Tax rates are unstable and regardless of how well or poorly a business does in a year, they still have to pay the same amount of taxes. (This is why I support reducing them for families as well.) Fixing education funding is key to minimizing the over-reliance on property taxes, and I will fight day and night for this.**

**Third, the State’s precarious fiscal situation has caused us to be a laughingstock in other areas of the country. Businesses depend on stability for long-term planning. Without a budget in place and with our bond rates dropping regularly, Illinois has not been a reliable partner with our businesses. Manufacturers cannot do smart long-term planning if they don’t know what tax rates will be, whether infrastructure improvements will be in place for them to transport their goods, and whether public schools will continue to have the funding they need to educate future employees. Getting the state on the path to fiscal stability is a top priority for me.**

**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) **I support the Low Carbon Portfolio Standard and the move forward to secure our low-carbon energy future by expanding alternative energy sources including wind and solar. I look forward to digging into the details of this legislation.**

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) **Support. We cannot afford to be short-sighted about the need to expand access to renewable energy. This is a win-win for Illinois as it grows our green jobs sector and minimizes our environmental footprint.**

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) **Absolutely. Opponents to commonsense gun regulations often like to point out that most guns used in crimes are owned illegally. But those same guns started out legally at some point and we must do everything in our capacity to keep them out of the wrong hands. That means background checks for every gun purchase, including those at gun shows, and capping the number of guns an individual can buy in a fixed period.**

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

A) **Support.**

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

A) **Yes. A gun is far more likely to be used in a suicide or homicide than on any sort of self-defense.**

**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) **Yes. The United States locks up far more of our citizens than any other country. We are home to 5% of the world’s population and 25% of the world’s prisoners. The failed War on Drugs has left us incarcerating non-violent drug offenders rather than getting them the substance abuse treatment they need. And, this disproportionately impacts low-income individuals and people of color, which has had a detrimental impact on families and communities. I support shifting resources from imprisoning people to rehabilitating people so they can become productive members of society.**

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) **It depends on the crime. I would not support this for sex offenses and other violent felonies.**

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) **Possibly. I do think it is important for juveniles to be housed close to home where they can regularly have contact with their families.**

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 would not support this proposal. Given the uncertainty of the success rate of this sort of therapy, I do not think it would be prudent to remove sex offenders from the registry and risk the threat to public safety.**

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

A) **I am very open to exploring ways to insulate judicial selection processes from being overly politicized. I would need to see details on this proposal.**

**Other:**

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

A) **Yes. My priority is to ensure that any redistricting process protects minority representation, but as long as that is secure, I generally believe that voters should pick their representative and not the other way around.**

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

A) **The workers’ compensation reform package from several years ago has not actually resulted in lower insurance rates for businesses. I would like to evaluate why those savings have not been passed on before we make additional changes to the system.**

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) **In Illinois, much more than in most other states, legislative leadership has vast control over what gets done in the legislature. And yet, when IL put campaign caps in place, it excluded caps on contributions from legislative leadership to candidates in general elections. Caps should apply to them as well.**

**We also need a year-long revolving-door ban so legislators can’t immediately leave their office and start lobbying their former colleagues. I would also like to explore the idea of having a single, bipartisan legislative staff, rather than two partisan staffs, to take the politics out of policy-making.**

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)

The most important teacher in my life was Ms. Hathaway. In high school she served as both my English teacher and my advisor. In our advisory, also known as homeroom in many schools, there were 20 girls who spent every day together from Freshman to Senior year. Ms. Hathaway was like our mom while at school and still teaches at my high school to this day. Ms. Hathaway always saw potential in us, held us to high expectations despite our circumstances or what people portrayed our communities to be like, and never made excuses for us. She was tough, but caring. She truly is a no nonsense nurturer. Because of this she pushed me beyond my limits and ensured I excelled beyond what the curriculum expected of me.

Ms. Hathaway shaped me to become an independent thinker and taught me the value of creating opportunities for others. In class she stressed the importance of dedicating your life to the betterment of our city. Every morning we grounded our day in current events and discussed our responsibility to make the community a better place for everyone it. I believe at this young age I was inspired to take action and commit myself to serving others. It is no surprise that I am now running for State Senate in order to serve my community on a broader scale. It started in Ms. Hathaway’s classroom and I am proud to say she still mentors me to this day.