**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.

*Please Explain:*

A promise is a promise.  We have to honor the deal that Chicago’s Bravest and Chicago’s Finest signed up for, this includes their healthcare.  That being said, I would welcome a market-based solution going forward.

Again, we absolutely honor the present deal for everyone on the books today.  Future defined benefit plans however would be less generous.  Future recruits get a choice between (less generous) defined benefit and (market-based) defined contribution plans, with a matching component, just like in the private sector.  There would be a financial literacy component, required before they made their choice.  I would be happy to design and deliver that component.

*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?*

It is an open secret that property taxes will go up.  Anybody saying otherwise doesn’t understand how math or political economy works.  Eventually, fiscal discipline becomes non-negotiable.  We are just about at that point.  The question is just how much and how soon.  The answer is about 9% and immediately.  Some minor amount of people will threaten to leave the city.  Let them.  Most won’t.  The housing market will immediately adjust.  In summary, property taxes will go up, the City will do right by its pensioners and we will get along fine.  It’s not the end of the world.

***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?*

My approach to achieving a solvent retirement system and improving the district’s finances would mirror the one I outlined (see above) for the Chicago Police and Fire Department.   We shift, on a go-forward basis, from a defined benefit to a defined contribution retirement plan, with employer matching for all new employees.

Also we work with the legislature in Springfield to update the funding formula.  Springfield owes Chicago $347 Million dollars in past due payments.  The State is ranked 49th nationally in terms of the portion of education funding covered by State.  Illinois owes Chicago.  It’s time to collect what’s due.

This has to happen in Springfield.  The CPS budget is about 5.3 Billion overall, mostly salaries.  Even if we threw every TIF dollar at the problem, it would be a drop in the bucket and wouldn’t address the structural funding deficit.

I would like to mention that that the CTU and CPS will be renegotiating their contract and there will be areas of collaboration.  It would be great if we could join forces to hold accountable our elected officials in Springfield through public hearings and the political process.  In this way, Springfield can be made to shift the manner in which it allocates funds for education.

***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:*

NO

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

*Yes or No:*

NO

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:*

Children are dying in the streets, in their homes.  What really is there to talk about?

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

I would just enforce the laws that are on the books right now.  I don’t know that we need any new legislation.

***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 members**and the Schools CEO. Do you support a change to an elected school board?*

*Yes or No:*

Yes

*Please explain:*

I fully support an elected school board.   The vast majority of school boards are elected and that seems to work pretty well elsewhere.  More democracy is a good thing.

***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:*

No

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

TIFs today are essentially a slush fund used to reward political allies and punish critics of the mayor.  I would call for a moratorium on the TIF program.  Obviously, we need to promote economic development, but that should be a line item in the budget and managed at the council level.  It would be equitable, clearer and much more transparent if the council discussed and debated the deployment of economic development funds.  Furthermore, I imagine there would be a lot more of the money flowing to the low-and-moderate-income parts of the city, where the need is greatest.

***7) Neighborhood economic development***

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

“We all do better when we all do better.”

~Senator Paul Wellstone

I work with small business owners all the time, always have.  They are my priority.  Frankly, they need the most help and I just really love that roll-your-sleeves-up part of the job.  I did a lot of it as Chief of Staff, and before that, as Director of Economic Development with the Eighteenth Street Development Corporation.

Small business is vital to economic development because, in the aggregate, that’s where the majority of the jobs are created.  You can’t really outsource a fresh haircut, drinks, karaoke, or a romantic meal.  When a community can get the economic development part right, everything else improves.  Good jobs flow from businesses needing to hire more folks.  Sure, big projects grab big headlines, and we’ll get to that in a minute; but just as important are all the small businesses in the neighborhoods.

I am wise in the ways of the private sector, but I also get how government can be a force for growth.  That might mean something as easy as fast-tracking a zoning variance, incidental use permit, alley access letter, or a loading zone.  It might mean working with city departments to mitigate fees associated with small business start-ups.  At its most basic level, simply being the ward’s Janitor-in-Chief is a good start.  By that I mean, making sure the snow is cleared, the street lights are on, garbage is picked up in a timely fashion, and promoting public safety so good people feel safe walking throughout the neighborhoods.  If you can do this, commerce follows and markets thrive.  Where markets thrive, crime goes down, culture ascends and we naturally weave a stronger fabric of community.  It’s pretty simple really.

The galleries, car washes, restaurants, gyms, bars, café’s and all of the other local enterprises all create cultural capital, making our communities unique.  All of them matter.  As Director of Small Business Development with the City Colleges of Chicago Workforce Institute, I developed a curriculum, recruited local businesses owners, and offered weekly economic development courses in a modern classroom setting.  It was like a mini-MBA course.

Small Business owners learned about technology, marketing, finance, accounting, human resources, legal issues, etc.; all matters vital to economic development.  Local business owners laid out and refined business plans.  Those plans were peer-reviewed.  This helped them access capital and grow their business.  A lot of the classes were in Spanish.  We even gave birth to a trade group: Together We Grow Automotive Association.  That organization is all grown up now and thriving.  Today the TWG Automotive Association is a nonprofit association of automotive service business owners in Chicagoland area and other parts of United States, and it all started humbly in our classroom.  No headlines, just hard work.  In that spirit I will continue to work hand-in-hand to strengthen the local economy one small business at a time.

There are countless stories of quiet victory in the neighborhood where I have lent a hand.  Angel’s Tire Shop is a tire repair shop on 18th & Leavitt celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.  It’s hard to quantify the economic impact they have had, helping people get to work, to the doctor, to school.  I helped them recently get media attention for a car raffle they were holding.  Casa Del Pueblo, a restaurant on 18th & Blue Island, is celebrating its 50th anniversary.  The owner was a student of mine at the local city college.  We updated her marketing plan and helped prepare this tasty neighborhood staple for the next fifty years of success- they have a tamale factory in the works.  On a more somber note, I worked with a family business a few years ago.  One day, tragedy struck and dad lost his life in a car accident.  Because we planned for every contingency, the Rodriguez family was able to carry on.  Thanks to an advanced markets financial services solution, tuitions were provided for, debts were settled and dad’s dream of creating Takito Grill, one of Chicago’s finest Mexican restaurants is a reality and going strong today.

Small businesses development is a top priority for me.  Hopefully, in the limited space we have here, I have given you clear examples of how we get it done at a micro-level.  I need to say something about the macro-level stuff though because we also need “magic to stir men’s blood...”  On that note, I am pleased to share with you that we are going to revitalize the old post office at the edge of downtown on the Congress Parkway at Canal Street, in the 27th precinct of the mighty 25th Ward.

The old post office building has been empty for almost 20 years.  This juggernaut of a building would be a perfect site for a mixed-use residential, commercial, institutional & entertainment enterprise.  It’s walking distance from multiple Metra rail lines, allowing us to bring in revenue from throughout the region.    
  
We will have a residential tower right above it.  "Chicago Tower" will be all about connectivity, learning and living per a cosmopolitan vision for Chicago in the next century.  Specifically, the project would be a public-private development between the city, foundations & REITS.  The project will include floors for multiple public elementary & high schools (with competing pedagogical models), universities, a public (possibly Presidential) library.  We can have a research & design hub and virtual rooms, like the ones being envisioned for the digital manufacturing project on Goose Island.  That project has already attracted over a quarter billion in matching funds from the private sector, leveraging 70 million in funding from the Federal Government.  We can do it bigger and better here.

With 2.7 million-square-foot of space, there would be ample opportunity for private investment in the form of business, (legal, medical, finance, tech), entertainment (movies, gaming, amusement), & non-profit (worship, & affordable residential) to help attract and promote the energy of young families back into the city.

The deal on the affordable rental housing component is you get to be part of this community for seven years with the option to transition up to market rate rent, after that. On the purchase side, there would be discounts and down payment assistance for public servants, teachers, cops, as well as families with students in the building's learning communities, sort of like a housing package, but for the whole family.  As I envision it, the majority (60%) of housing is next-generation high-end residential.  Think soaring architecture; think, Booth pavilion at the University of Chicago.  Think, Shanghai Tower.  Think, Gehry’s "8 Spruce Street" in Lower Manhattan.  It's a super high-rise vertical neighborhood; designed locally, of course.   
  
The superstructure would be a "Big Shoulders" project, like the ECB building in Frankfurt but bigger, with majestic multi-level atriums between the towers.  This way we multiply the green space.  The existing structure is a built like a tank, which should easily handle the load bearing requirements of parking & any upgrades to the superstructure operating systems, say for instance a multi-bay Bus Rapid Transit station.

With the right infrastructure in place, you shouldn’t even need a car to get to work.  For instance, we include, by design, a Bus Rapid Transit with signal prioritization, dedicated bus lanes, and pay-before-you-board bus stations for connectivity to the central business district and the surrounding suburbs, not to mention the neighborhoods.  Minneapolis is a great example.  We build an underground link to Union Station for easy winter commutes, and protected bike lanes for fun healthy transit options, the rest of the year.  This connectivity creates revenue opportunities, as well as a sense of community.

Speaking of transportation, Chicago is a world class city with evolving transportation needs.  Young people are driving less and seeking mobility alternatives.  Where money is tight, being car-free can mean big savings for a household.  One of the reasons Pilsen, West Loop and Chinatown are so attractive is that they have access to great public transportation. We, as policymakers, need to focus on this market shift as well as the need for low-income workers to switch to public transit solutions.  Looking forward, Millennials are seeking to live in dense, highly walkable environments.  We can make that vision a reality in the 25th Ward; and incidentally, do it without any concerns of gentrification because we are building Chicago’s newest most desirable community completely from scratch.

Of course, we will include our friends at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development to participate in the planning, and funding.  This transportation component of the larger plan is important because it helps make the project more accessible and sustainable.  It reduces emissions, and optimizes access.  I will press our friends in Washington on the Appropriations and Transportation Committees to add their heft to this project.

Finally, I want to take a minute to note that, as Alderman, I would work closely with the Department of Planning and Development.  I get their culture.  I respect their capacity to impact a community.  These are dedicated career professionals, and our city is incredibly lucky to have them at her service.  Whether the issue is housing, zoning, land use, or any economic development plans, you have to listen to the experts.  They have the power to turn vacant lots into grocery stores, stadiums, hospitals.  Therefore I would work humbly, collaboratively, and diligently with the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners of the Department of Planning and Development.  In partnership, we will make no little plans. Working together, we will breathe life into those plans, for the benefit of our Ward and the City as a whole.

***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 council is fine at 50.  We need to keep it this many so that people have access and can hold their elected officials accountable.  It’s a lot harder to vote a Congressman out than an Alderman.  Fifty also allows for more diversity of thought.  I see the various wards as incubators for policy.  What works in one ward (recycling, participatory budgeting, C\*A\*P\*S) might not take off in another ward.

***9) A Chicago casino***

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

*Yes or No:*

YES

*Please explain:*

We need the money.

***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:*

They are a revenue source masquerading as a public safety measure.  This is disingenuous.  We should eliminate both programs immediately.

***11) Ward issues***

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

My community is primarily concerned with public safety, education and infrastructure.  The way to address all three is through economic development.  Economic development (see above) provides jobs, and tax revenue which we need for public safety, education and infrastructure.