**Name: John D’Amico**

**District running for: 15th, State Representative**

**Political party: Democratic**

**Political/civic background:**

**Occupation:**

**Education:**

**Campaign website:**

**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.*

**I voted against the state income tax hike in 2011. Raising taxes should be a last resort only if vital services for seniors, children and education are at risk and after we cut all that we can from the budget, increase government accountability and eliminate redundancies in programs and agencies.**

*2.     Expand the sales tax to services.*

**I do not support expanding taxes simply to pay for new programs or encourage more state spending. Any tax expansion should be done as a last resort measure only after budget cuts and accountability measures are enacted.**

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

**I do not support adding a new tax for seniors already living on fixed incomes. I am co-sponsoring a resolution in the House to oppose any future attempts to do so.**

*4.     Adopt a progressive income tax.*

**I supported a measure to enact a surcharge on income over $1 million, which would raise $1 billion in new revenue for our local schools without raising taxes on middle class families.**

*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 state’s pension debt is one of our most pressing issues and we cannot afford to do nothing. We must take meaningful steps to ensure that the system is solvent while making sure that workers are a part of the reform process. The Supreme Court’s ruling that the previous pension reform law passed is unconstitutional because of the reductions to current employee benefits significantly limits what the legislature can do. The state cannot afford to be involved in a costly legal battle only to be told again that reform is unconstitutional.**

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) **Like most proposals that come before the legislature, there are some ideas I can support and other ideas that I would not support in this template. I cannot support a new tax on seniors, many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. I oppose all attempts to drive down the wages of working men and women and middle class families, and believe that we need to focus on improving the economy, attracting new business, and improving the education system in order to raise wages for all Illinoisans. I certainly support efforts to pay off the backlog of state bills and reduce the state’s debt, and I have supported previous budget plans that made progress towards this goal. For the past seven years, we have made our pension payments in full, which we should continue to do to provide stability to the system and fulfill our obligations. I believe we can make meaningful changes to the workers’ compensation system to save tax dollars while protecting the rights of injured workers.**

**Education:**

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

A) **School funding remains a contentious issue and there are various proposals to recalculate the state funding formula. As a father, I believe strongly that every child in the state should have access to a quality education, and that geography should not play a role in determining a child’s opportunity for success. When we consider these critical issues, it is important to me that we are not enhancing some schools at the expense of other schools in our community. I supported a measure to create a new tax surcharge for income over $1 million annually that would raise $1 billion in additional funds for schools, which would be distributed to all districts in all corners of the state. While this proposal would not fix all of our school funding problems, it would steer us in the right direction as a much-needed funding boost for the schools in our community.**

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) **Our first priority should be increasing transparency and accountability with school salaries and benefits at the local level so that taxpayers know where their money is going and districts are held accountable for their contract decisions. Local residents are already paying high property taxes, and I will continue to take this into consideration when considering proposals to shift pension costs.**

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) **A strong public higher education system has far-reaching effects not only for families in Illinois, but also for businesses that depend on an educated workforce. By underfunding universities, we risk losing top talent and research opportunities. I have two children in college currently, and my youngest will start college in the fall. I know that the cost of higher education is a growing more and more burdensome on middle-class families. These higher education funding issues must be solved as a partnership with the state and the university system. Universities have an obligation to review their budgets, streamline services and cut unnecessary spending to ensure that they are operating as effectively and efficiently as possible. At the state level, while Governor Rauner’s proposed budget devastated higher education funding with a 30% cut in state funding, I opposed these cuts and fought to restore funding to keep college affordable and solidify Illinois’ status as a leader in higher education. I support increasing funding for MAP grants to help students of all income levels attend college and invest in their futures.**

**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) **Infrastructure is critical to families, communities and business, and the state needs long-term plans to improve infrastructure with adequate and continual investments. It is impractical and expensive to wait to develop a building and funding plan until the roads and bridges are in desperate need of repair. I do not support new taxes that unfairly overburden middle-class families.**

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. Continual investment in our infrastructure will help to ensure a strong infrastructure and avoid greater long-term costs associated with poor planning and investment.**

**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) **Creating jobs in our communities is the best way to jump-start the economy. In June,** [**Crain’s**](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20150619/EMPLOYMENT/150619769/illinois-among-top-states-in-creating-businesses) **reported that Illinois is ranked the number two state in the nation “where businesses are being created the fasts,” as reported by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. While there is much more work to be done, the steps we take now are creating a strong framework for job creation and business growth.**

**First, manufacturers throughout the state tell me that they have plenty of jobs available – jobs that pay well with good benefits. The problem is not simply a lack of jobs, it is a lack of a skilled workforce with the advanced, specific training needed to fill the positions that are available. We need to work with community colleges and technical schools to ensure that the training programs reflect the demand in the industry. We all must talk to young people about the opportunities that exist in manufacturing and encourage them to consider manufacturing as a viable career choice.**

**Second, we must think outside of the box when it comes to jobs. Green technology is vital to a modern 21st Century economy, and we should invest in industries that will create good-paying jobs not just for right now, but also for decades to come. I am sponsoring the Green Jobs bill, estimated to create 30,000 jobs, to encourage job growth in this emerging industry.**

**Third, businesses depend on reliable infrastructure to transport goods. I support infrastructure investment through a long-term infrastructure plan to prevent our roads, bridges, facilities and airports from deterioration.**

**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) **While I have concerns about an increased cost to consumers, I understand the benefits of reducing emissions and keeping existing energy jobs.**

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 am a co-sponsor of the Clean Jobs bill, which has been estimated to create more than 30,000 jobs in Illinois. Clean energy and green technology are integral to the economy of the future. Additionally, the Clean Jobs bill will reduce carbon emissions while helping consumers save on energy costs.**

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) **Reducing carbon emissions to meet federal guidelines will take a number of changes, and a cap-and-trade program or carbon tax could help reach these goals.**

**Gun safety:**

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

A) **Strengthening firearm policies is an important aspect of reducing the violent crime that has plagued Chicago. Tightening criminal background checks and cracking down on illegal purchasing are common-sense measures we can take to keep weapons out of the wrong hands.**

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) **Support.**

**Criminal justice:**

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

A) **I am proud to call many police officers my friends and neighbors, and I know that the overwhelming majority of our law enforcement are honest, hardworking, dedicated professionals who put their lives on the line every day to keep our families safe. Members of law enforcement are as upset as anyone else when an officer behaves inappropriately or betrays our trust; when that betrayal occurs, officers should be held accountable.**

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) **Criminal justice reform must be a balanced approach that considers the potential of an offender to rehabilitate successfully, the impact on society and justice for the victims. I am wary of any new early release initiative given the utter failings of the previous early release program under Gov. Quinn that allowed criminals to go free, only for some of them to commit horrendous crimes after they were released prematurely.**

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) **This is a very broad question, and I would have to see specific proposals and speak with law enforcement and corrections officers to evaluate the risk and benefits to society and the victims of these crimes.**

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) **These are complicated issues that would require significant research, input and consideration between corrections officials and lawmakers. Protecting public safety is my first priority.**

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 will continue to support any law that protects children, seniors and our families from sex offenders.**

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

A) **I support a transparent democratic process that puts selection of elected officials in the hands of the voters, not bureaucrats, and holds those judges accountable to the voters who elect them.**

**Other:**

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

A) **I support independent redistricting reforms that uphold the Voting Rights Act and the rights of minority voters. I have some concerns about turning the process over to a bureaucratic panel that is not held accountable by the voters, but am open to ideas that would improve the process.**

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

A) **I voted for the workers’ compensation reform legislation in 2011, which has been successful in reducing medical fees and costs to Illinois business. I will continue to work with stakeholders to find additional ways to continue to reform the system to enact meaningful cost savings for businesses while protecting injured workers. I will not support any measure that drives down wages or the standard of living for middle-class families, and as a result, harms our economy.**

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) **Earning and maintaining the public’s trust in state government remains an ongoing goal. During my tenure, I have supported many landmark ethics and campaign finance reform laws that have limited campaign contributions, increased transparency in campaign finance, strengthened the Freedom of Information Act to increase government transparency and increased accountability for public officials. I support any measure that builds upon these efforts, including legislation creating a new offense for theft of public funds.**

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) **Every teacher has a unique opportunity to not only teach lessons in the classroom, but also in life. I am fortunate to have had many teachers who served as role models and helped to build my character. My high school coach and teacher Jim Harrington taught me that nothing in life comes easy. Working hard and working as a team is the key to success – lessons that I carry with me to this day.**