**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: *Rafael Yañez*

Ward: *15th*

Occupation: *Crime Prevention Specialist with the Chicago Police Department*

Education:  *B.S. Law Enforcement Administration - Calumet College of St. Joseph*

*M.S. Public Safety Management - Calumet College of St. Joseph*

*Ed.D. Organizational Leadership – Argosy University*

Previous political and civic experience:

*This is my first time seeking political office. In 2007 I founded U.N.I.O.N. Impact Center for which I currently serve as president. I am a committee member of CUBY, the Committee to Unify Back of the Yards, the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council Quality of Life Plan, as well as of LIVID Chicago, Lower the Incidence of Violent Injuries and Deaths. I currently serve as a Board Trustee with the Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago. I previously served as a Local School Council member at Hamline Elementary School.*

**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: *Yes*

Please Explain:

*It is unavoidable that changes are coming. The courts likely will rule that alterations to contracts, such as pension provisions, are unconstitutional. Any attempt to reduce the pension benefits will almost surely result in overtaxing other city services to accommodate reductions in benefits. This is a way the city is deferring conclusive action with a short-term solution. If a pensioner is not able to receive the benefits they earned, they will be forced to utilize other public services in order to make ends meet. Not only is this fiscally inept, but it is also inhumane to those that worked hard to earn that pension.*

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?

*Because of the bond disasters the City and the Board of Education have engaged in, the City will need to raise taxes in order to reimburse them. It does not seem unreasonable to dedicate a portion of that to reducing the pension liability. I’m certain, once elected, there will be other solutions that may present themselves and my ideas are admittedly a start on a long road to meeting the needs of hard working people and realizing some semblance of fiscal solvency.*

**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?

*In addition to renegotiating the toxic bond swaps CPS needs to curtail both its poor investment strategies, suspect contracts with private companies and it’s questionable programming costs. It continuously claims cost savings for poorly thought out initiatives that serve the mayors press strategy more than they actually serve children. CPS needs to discipline its spending back towards the schools and not for system-wide policy misadventures. The TIF surplus needs to be returned to taxing bodies, including the Board of Education, and TIFs that have outlived there usefulness need to revaluated for termination if they’ve fulfilled all other standing obligations. This, in addition to the previously mentioned options, need to be seriously considered.*

**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.*** *Chicago already has one of the highest sales taxes in the nation. The city needs to develop other initiatives to make up the lost tax base.*

\* A tax on non-Chicago residents who work in the city

Yes or No: ***No.***  *Such a policy would hinder innovation and keep bright individuals that live outside Chicago, working outside the city.*

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

Yes or No: ***Yes****. For too long large financial institutions have enjoyed a lax environment courtesy of the current mayor’s administration. The tax burden is left to city residents to make up. Estimates say the state could lose $10 billion to $12 billion annually, with $2 billion directly to the City of Chicago by not enacting the proposal. The value of trades on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) and the Chicago Board Options Exchange (CBOE) totals well over $900 trillion. In addition, the trading venue themselves will not be responsible with the tax, but rather on the institutional and individuals who trade.*

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:

*I do support hiring more police officers to alleviate the already overwhelmed police force. The abuse of the overtime system not only puts tired officers on the streets, but fiscally speaking it does not make much sense either. The current police force is not sufficient to the needs in the communities. We need to train more police officers to engage in community policing tactics, strengthen the existing bonds between the department and community and faith organizations as well as collaborate to form new unions.*

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

*Even if statewide legislation is enacted, and I support very strong laws regarding illegal guns. However the reality is that in order to effectively deal with this Chicago will need to engage in regional relationship building with other municipalities in the Indiana/ Illinois, Wisconsin corridor on this issue. Not to mention the path that gun running follows up from the south.*

**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:

*In light of recent allegations of corruption by the school board, it is vital that school board members are representative and elected by the constituents.*

*Undeniably, the Chicago Board of Education is in need of reconstruction. Under an appointed school board, the district has suffered drastic changes, such as record school closings, that affected millions of CPS students. Having an elected school board will allow the voices of the communities to be heard and allow residents to exercise their right to choose by electing the individuals they believe will make the best decisions for their neighborhood schools.*

**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: *Yes, the TIF surplus is the consequence of hoarding by the City to underwrite extravagant projects in the center of the city with little or no accountability for the spending. All it takes is a train ride (since driving and parking downtown is too expensive for many 15th ward residents) to the loop or north Michigan Ave. to see that downtown or the “Magnificent Mile” are not suffering from underdevelopment. These areas and the TIFs within them constitute a significant portion of the surplus generated.*

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

*I would not support expansion or extension of 15th ward TIF districts until my staff and I have had a chance to evaluate their status and viability and I’ve had sufficient input from community residents. In general the city needs to comply with much more rigorous standards for defining and creating TIF districts. The original notion of its use as a tool to alleviate “blighted” areas is made a mockery by the extravagant projects that have been funded by TIFs downtown.*

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

*Improving the economic climate of the 15th ward will require action in a number of different ways. Working with residents, community leaders and organizations to examine and analyze the community assets our communities currently have (so as to avoid a deficit-model of thinking), making certain to support and promote the existing local business and entrepreneurial efforts, Look at creating incubators for businesses and services that currently don’t exist for our communities. Also we need to increase the consumer power of the residents of the 15th ward by supporting initiatives that hold Big Box retailers accountable for the business they seek in the 15th ward.*

**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?

*No. I believe a city as wide and as diverse needs proper representation. Having a large city council allows everyone to have a voice in city politics. Reducing the number of aldermen from the current 50 would make decisions impacting the city more exclusive.*

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

Yes or No: *No*

Please explain:

*I’m hesitant to support the idea of establishing gambling casinos in Chicago because of its potential costs, both financial as well as to the fabric of life in the city. Of course, my final decision would depend on the specific details of the proposal and its overall impact to the city but proponents try to sell the idea as a vague proposal that would alleviate the city financial shortcomings. The truth is, revenue from a casino is not the silver bullet many portray it to be to solve the fiscal issues faced by the city. Developers would have to detail exactly how the establishment would benefit the city, to what magnitude, and in what timeframe.*

**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 and No*

Please explain:

*The roots for the red light and speed camera programs have been clouded by controversy and even potentially illegal dealings. Fines for minimal infractions combined with the rising cost of transportation, including parking rate hikes and increased traffic fines make residents feel as if the program is simply another taxing machine for the city. The city is slowly converting our streets into toll roads. For example, the shortened yellow light, which was quietly introduced, resulted in increased revenue but did not provide any real safety benefits to motorists. The city needs to move away from these initiatives and focus on more sensible traffic safety strategies that don’t further burden residents.*

**11) Ward issues**

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

*After talking with many community residents the top three concerns in our ward are public safety, school accessibility, and inclusive representation.*

*Residents have identified public Safety as a primary concern. This is a problem that binds together Englewood, Gage Park, Back of the Yards and Brighton Park. What is often missing in the community is the central figure, the alderman that can leverage resources and community ties to confront this problem. The alderman can bring these diverse communities together with an open and accessible stewardship. Many community organizations, institutions, and leaders in these communities have worked to deal with Public Safety and we can unite these efforts in this newly drawn ward to have a strong impact by using the centrality of the office of alderman. The city of Chicago closed 50 schools across the city, 6 of them were closed in Englewood alone; no other community was saturated with this many school closings.* *As alderman I will be committed to strengthening trust between community members and the police department. It is clear that a lot of work needs to be done. I have worked in every community that composes the 15th ward. Address community issues through open communication. We must reinvigorate the CAPS program, and improving accountability.*

*The city closed over 50 schools in the city, 6 of them in the Englewood community. School accessibility is a very hot topic in the 15th ward since many of the children living in the ward attended one of the schools closed at some point in their educational career. Many of them have younger siblings that no longer have the option of attending a school in their neighborhood, they are forced to take several buses or walk numerous blocks through gang-contested territory.*

*Residents of the 15th ward want representation that takes into account their concerns and their needs. The community needs an alderman that is reliable and available, not a puppet that spends his entire time downtown or in his ward office hiding behind a desk. Because this is a substantially new ward with seemingly disparate communities the need for openness and connectedness is greater. I see at as part of my job to make this happen. Working together with community leaders, organizations and institutions will be pivotal to improving the economic climate and quality of life for the residents of the 15th ward.*