**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: Deb Mell

Ward: 33rd Ward

Occupation: 33rd Ward Alderman

Education: Bachelor’s Degree from Cornell College

Previous political and civic experience:

State Representative of 40th State House District --- 2009-2013

Alderman of 33rd Ward --- July 2013-Present

**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:

Please Explain:

As a State Representative I voted for pension reform. We cannot continue to ignore the problem and kick the can down the road. Municipal employees do not pay into social security and therefore it is imperative their retirement is secured. By making changes to our pensions going forward, for example by adjusting the COLA, we can ensure our employees will have a pension. Doing nothing is not an option because it will ensure the insolvency of our pension systems.

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 would not support a property tax increase.

**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?

Just like the pensions for city workers, I believe it is imperative to secure the Chicago Teachers Pension Fund. While going forward, we need to make changes to our pensions, reduce spending, adjust the COLA, and secure what our teacher’s have earned.

**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**:

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

Yes or **No**:

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

Yes or **No**:

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

I do not believe increasing taxes is the answer to the City of Chicago’s financial issues.

**4) Crime**

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

**Yes** or No:

Please explain:

It is important for elected officials to strengthen their partnerships with city departments, such as Police and Fire to coordinate efforts to increase public safety. Preserving jobs for local law enforcement and community involvement is crucial to keeping crime down. I believe that increasing current community policing efforts and bringing resources to schools and parks to provide after school programs for the youth in the community can benefit keeping the crime to a minimum. While serving as alderman, I have attended CAPS meetings, neighborhood community meetings, and have been working with the local police to improve public safety in my ward.

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

We need to keep guns out of the hands of criminals in Chicago. I support any legislation that keeps guns restricted. My focus is to keep the neighborhoods and the residents of the 33rd Ward safe.

**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:

Please explain:

I don't believe we need more politics in our schools and therefore do not believe there should be a solely elected school board. I would like to see a combination of elected and appointed.   The Mayor who appoints the school board is elected and should be held accountable for the performance of our 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:

I am committed to TIF reform and transparency, making sure 33rd ward residents are informed and have an important role in the spending of our TIF funds is vital. In the 2013 budget I returned over 9 million dollars in TIF surplus. However, TIF can play an important role.

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

I would like to see TIF money going back into the communities and into schools. In my ward we plan to use TIF to create a much-needed green space for APMA, Hibbard and Edison schools.

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

We are fortunate in the 33rd ward to have great businesses that hire locally. Bringing the business community together to set goals for local economic improvement is key to attracting businesses to the ward, this is exactly what I am doing. I am creating a ward plan to help new business understand our area and set up shop, which brings new jobs.

**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 alderman’s office is the main line of communication from residents to the city. I believe a reduction would harm city services.

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

**Yes** or No:

Please explain:

Chicago already enjoys thriving tourism but we can do better. Bringing world-class attractions to our city only ensures a steady flow of tourism dollars.

**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:

Please explain:

Evidence shows red light cameras work to reduce traffic fatalities but it is crucial to constantly monitor the system to make sure it’s working. It is also important to decommission existing cameras when appropriate.

**11) Ward issues**

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

The resident’s of the 33rd Ward and I agree that the highest priority for improving the ward is strengthening neighborhood schools, building our local economy and improving public safety. The children from our community deserve the best education possible. Education lays the foundation of a child’s development and is an investment for the future. Providing our children with a great education will provide a positive impact on our community’s economic growth and public safety.