Q) Do you support installing disinfection technology at Stickney, the world’s largest wastewater treatment plant?

A) Absolutely. To not do so is morally reprehensible.

Q) How would you improve the current phosphorus-removal plans underway at the MWRD? Do you think this important? If so, why?

A) Phosphorus removal needs to be speeded up. The affect that phosphorus has on the growth of algae and other organisms is well documented. Its presence in detergents decades ago showed how bad it was for waterways and how expensive it is to deal with in trying to remove from our drinking water.

Q) Do you support any alternatives to maximize the capacity of the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan? Which ones do you support?

A) Unfortunately, the TRAP will not be completed until 2029 and there is no way of knowing for sure how effective it will be. To help alleviate flooding problems that occur every year, I would expand the program to purchase properties in flood prone areas through the Cook County Land Bank Authority such as was done on December 21, 2016, for example (File# 16-0067). Doing so would create areas in which excess water can eventually soak into the ground or slowly drain into the waterways instead of overwhelming our systems and flooding homes and businesses. I would also ban the further installation of single flush toilets throughout the MWRD area. Dual flush toilets would reduce the demands on our waterways at all times and especially during heavy rains. The MWRD has a rain barrel program for homeowners that will store water that federal actions forced it into. The problem is that it is voluntary and requires some degree of work every spring and every autumn for the homeowner who opts to use the rain barrel. The rain barrel program should be required in all new construction in the MWRD area with methods to make it easier to use. Incorporating a program into construction is much more effective than retrofitting.

Q) What do you think the MWRD’s role should be in reducing chloride usage?

A) Like phosphorus, chloride can be a problem. Alternatives to its use by industry and by individuals should be explored and encouraged.

Q) What should the MWRD’s role be in reducing combined sewer overflows? What is the MWRD’s role in informing the public about CSO’s? How would rate the MWRD’s performance in informing the public about CSO’s, and why?

A) CSOs have been a problem in the Chicago Metro area for more than 100 years. Reducing the amount of water entering into the sewage system to start with would help (see above responses regarding the TARP). My long term view is that the sewer system has to be eventually divorced from the regular drainage system. The Army Corps of Engineers should be solicited to conduct a study on the costs, benefits, and time frame needed to accomplish the separation of the two systems. In some cases there are discharge pipes into the Chicago River that do not indicate that the water flowing from the pipes is untreated waste water. All these pipes need to be clearly labeled and the MWRD should issue clear warnings that people should avoid these areas after they have been used for discharge. Water sample should be taken to keep us informed when the water in an area is safer than before the rains.

Q) How do you the see role of wastewater treatment agencies changing over the next 10 years?

A) I think the MWRD needs to continue doing its current work, only smarter and more cost effectively. Right now, few citizens barely know of its existence except when it is time to pay taxes or if they are in area that suffers a flood. Not being aware of the MWRD is a good thing in the sense that people don’t realize its overall importance; they just flush their toilets and their waste problem is taken care of. I feel the MWRD can do this better with a better use of tax dollars.

Q) Should the MWRD set a goal of making Chicago area waterways clean enough for swimming?

A) Yes, if possible, but realistically, I believe, as one example, the Sanitary and Ship Canal, nor any direct connection it has with other water ways, will never be safe enough for swimming.

Q) What should the MWRD’s role be in addressing Asian carp and other invasive species in Chicago area waterways?

A) In December, 2013, the Army Corps of Engineers reported that the Asian carp, despite our electric barriers, will eventually find its way into the Great Lakes.

The report stated that passing ships “can capture fish and transport them beyond the electrical barriers.” It also stated that “certain barge configurations” could weaken the electrical barriers, allowing 2-4 inch long fish to enter into Lake Michigan. Although there is no evidence that this has occurred, it seems likely that it will happen eventually. If it does, the Asian carp will eventually wreck havoc on the commercial and recreational fishing in all of the Great Lakes.

The 2011 “Great Lakes Mississippi River Interbasin Study”, conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers, specifically addressed the problem of invasive species and identified at least 13 species that could cause problems, the Asian carp being the most well known of them. The study came up with six proposals to try to stop the spread of invasive species from water system to the other. The only one that can guarantee to stop the spread of these species is to totally undo 100 plus years of engineering that connects the two water systems and separate them as they were originally in nature. The Corps of Engineers estimated to do so would take about 25 years and cost about $19 billion. This is a large sum of money but spending it would protect commercial and sports fishing on the Great Lakes; which generates about $4 billion of economic activity every year.

Q) The MWRD is Cook County’s second largest landowner. Does the District have a responsibility to ensure companies to which it leases land are good environmental stewards?

A) Yes. In 2015 Olympic Oil, which rents some MWRD land along the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, was discovered to have made four toxic spills in the previous nine years that they are known to have reported. One spill was uncovered by accident when federal inspectors were on the property investigating a different spill. There is a distinct possibility that all spills were not reported as required by law. At one of the MWRD public meetings, when the MWRD Executive Director was asked about this and what can be done about it, he replied that the MWRD can send a letter to each tenant reminding them of the law and asking that they be mindful of complying with the law. This is nonsense. I believe that there is a conflict of interest when the MWRD leases land to businesses that may pollute the waters that MWRD is supposed to keep clean. It would be best if the MWRD got out of renting land to businesses like this but if it contends to be a landlord, include severe penalties for any tenants who pollute the waterways.

Q) How would you rate the current performance of the District?

A) I would give it a grade of “C”. For the most part it does carry out its legally mandated functions but there is more it can and should do to use our tax dollars more effectively.

Q) What should the District’s role be in coordinating efforts with other government agencies in the Chicago area watersheds to manage those watersheds?

A) The District is already involved in working with other government agencies but given its size, it must take the lead in developing co-operative plans and strategies to deal with waste water and flooding. Unfortunately, the district boundaries are geopolitical constructs that do not align perfectly with the hydrology of our area. It must take a larger view of the water problems of our entire area.