**2015 CHICAGO SUN-TIMES CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

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Ward: *40th*

Occupation: *Attorney*

Education: *Mather High School; Loyola University; Loyola Law School*

Previous political and civic experience:

*Alderman (40th Ward)*

*Committeeman (40th Ward)*

*Hawthorne Scholastic Academy, LSC Member and Chairman (former)*

**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:

**I support the timetable set up to meet the City’s obligations provided in the report by the Mayor’s Commission to Strengthen Chicago’s Pension Funds. While adequately funding the system moving forward will help the system long-term, reforms are needed now to preserve benefits for current and retired employees. We made some progress through new CBAs, but the savings we have achieved so far, while significant, does not solve our entire pension problem.**

**The entire pension reform issue is currently before the courts, and we will be bound to the decision that the court makes. It makes sense to see how Springfield acts on the issue to best determine how much work remains in the City to fill the gap.**

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?

**The question of increasing property taxes to fund the amounts required to fund police, fire, municipal and laborers pensions is not an all or nothing. We could not raise property taxes high enough to provide the revenue necessary, so it is safe to say that a property tax increase will be just one component of a much larger comprehensive solution. Given what the larger picture will require, I am prepared to make property taxes one piece of the puzzle.**

**In the past years, we had been able to freeze property taxes to help homeowners, but I have also voted for responsible property tax increases when the situation required it. Any future property tax increase to help fund pensions should be coupled with pension reform, other revenue sources, and additional cost-saving measures.**

**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?

**Chicagoans unfairly pay for the teachers’ pension funds three times over. They pay the 9% for the Board of Education, 7 of the 9% the teachers are supposed to pay in the pension pick-up, and then for suburban and downstate teachers through our state income taxes. The system formula needs to be reworked, possibly on a statewide basis.**

**Shifting reliance away from property taxes would be preferable. I would look to TIF reform monies, explore filing an arbitration claim with FINRA and work with banks and financial institutions to voluntarily renegotiate the deals to bring monies back to the City due to the costly interest rate swaps. I will also work with the state of Illinois and the General Assembly to find a solution to our broader school funding issues.**

**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

**X** Yes or No:

**Yes, I would consider broadening the sales tax to more selected consumer services. Illinois is one of the few states that does not tax services. Illinois taxes approximately 17 services, most related to utilities, compared to the other 49 states which tax an average of 56 services. In a service-based economy, I think this makes sense and would lessen our reliance on other revenue streams, such as property taxes.**

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

Yes or **X** No:

**No, because I do not believe this would be productive. It would result in just another reason for business to relocate outside of the City. It would harm the workforce, be almost impossible to enforce, and result in lengthy and costly legal fights.**

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

**X** Yes or No:

**Yes, although I think we need to determine the potential of them being able to move out of Chicago given the nature of today’s online market and lack of reliance on trading floors.**

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:

Please explain:

**I support any effort to combat the crime and gun violence that our city is facing. We are fortunate because the 40th Ward includes the lowest crime police district in the city – but that doesn’t mean that we don’t experience crime or that our job is done. Every child, family, and senior citizen deserves to live in safe neighborhood without fear that they will become a victim of senseless crime. In addition to training additional officers to patrol our streets, I am committed to working with the police department to find ways to reassign officers from desk jobs to higher-crime areas.**

**It is important to note that while more police officers would be a comfort, the fact is that our policing resources can only stretch so far. Cost benefit analyses have shown that it is less costly to taxpayers to use overtime for existing officers rather than adding to the force. I have supported CeaseFire and Safety Net to address violence, as well as before and after school programs as affordable alternatives for at risk youth. Our issues with crime are not solely a policing issue, but also a societal issue.**

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

**Illinois already has strong laws in place criminalizing the means by which illegal guns find their way to Illinois and Chicago, but we need to do more to enforce the existing laws and increase the penalties for violations.**

**Strengthening background checks, increasing criminal penalties for straw purchasers, and cracking down on gun dealers who skirt the law will prevent many firearms from ending up in the wrong hands. I also support limiting multiple gun sales to prevent trafficking.**

**I expect the state’s Illegal Gun Trafficking Task Force, a bi-partisan group tasked with crafting common-sense anti-trafficking legislation in the state, to produce a set of recommendations that will be considered by lawmakers in Springfield as early as this spring. I intend to support these efforts to prevent the flow of illegal guns to Chicago.**

**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 **X** No:

Please explain:

**I was an early supporter of an elected school board and even introduced an ordinance and a resolution supporting the elected school board. I do have serious concerns about how a city as diverse as Chicago could be representative of the student population and workforce. The student demographics in CPS are much different with a significantly higher minority population than the city’s overall population. I believe that there are lingering, yet extremely vital questions, as to how a school board would be elected – for example, would members be elected district-wide or split into smaller member districts – and I remain concerned about the undue influence of special interests in a school board election. It is important to note that appointed school boards are not unusual for large cities like Chicago.**

**I believe that educators and the community at large must play an important role in the direction of our public schools. I fully support the power of Local School Councils to make the decisions that are best for their schools and their students. As a former LSC Chairman at my children’s school, I feel as though LSCs serve their communities and students well.**

**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:

**The majority of TIF expenditures for my ward has been for public capital projects, school additions and capital projects, and, more recently, for the expansion of the emergency room at Swedish Covenant Hospital and the creation of a Women’s Health Center there. I support responsible TIF use. I support the changes made to the use of TIF that we have enacted since the Mayor formed the TIF Task Force. Excess TIF funds have been surplussed back into the budget each year for the past three years. Much of what is being termed as excess are pledged or dedicated to existing or completed projects.**

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

**I support the reforms in the TIF Reform Panel report issued August 23, 2011.**

**7) Neighborhood economic development**

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

**Our ward has seen tremendous development in the last few years. I worked to bring the Target store to Peterson Avenue and required the company to host a local job fair before opening employment to the rest of the public. I helped employers stay and expand or locate in our ward by convening appropriate City personnel and community stakeholders to resolve issues or concerns. Tempel Steel’s recommitment to our ward is one example and I also worked with S&C Electric on the 40th Ward border to help and be responsive to their surrounding City infrastructure. I helped bring the Half Acre Brewery expansion to Bowmanville by working with the company and the community at large to fully discuss issues before making a decision. I believe economic development is a community effort.**

**The closing of the Dominick’s was a significant issue in our community. I spoke with many store owners interested in replacing the property and, ultimately, we brought in Tony’s. While many former Dominick’s stores are still in transition, we were able to execute a smooth and efficient process that minimized inconvenience for our families.**

**I often meet with local business owners and am committed to keeping the jobs we already have while creating new employment and economic opportunities throughout the ward. The small businesses and mom and pop shops that line our commercial streets are what make our community a destination shopping area for consumers throughout the region. I worked with community and business leaders in Andersonville to limit the influx of national chains and instead recruit local, independent businesses.**

**It is equally important to me to preserve residential areas for our families, and only explore economic development projects in these areas that are compatible with the residential nature of the area.**

**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?

**I support the current size of the City Council. I worry that reducing the size of the council and the number of wards would result in a decreased quality of services and weakened representation for residents. In a city as diverse as Chicago, the current size of the City Council allows for equal and fair representation for minority groups, community areas and neighborhoods. Reducing the size of the Council will reduce the percentage of representation of minority communities. I do not see that as a positive.**

**9) A Chicago casino**

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

**X** Yes or No:

Please explain:

**I believe that a casino would allow us to add an additional revenue source for the City that is currently being exported to Indiana and the Chicago suburbs.**

**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?

**X** Yes or No:

Please explain:

**While the red light cameras have not produced the revenue that was expected, I believe that the cameras in my community have made our dangerous intersections safer for families and senior citizens. The decrease in violations issued at these intersections is proof that they are working and drivers are being more conscious. As with any new program, there is always room for improvement and I am committed to tweaking the program as needed to improve safety on our streets.**

**11) Ward issues**

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

1. **Jobs and Economic Development: Maintaining and improving the local economy is probably the highest priority in the ward and my top priority is bringing good-paying jobs to Chicago and boosting economic development in the city and in the 40th Ward. Walkable, inviting, arterial streets bordering stable residential streets result therefrom. As Chairman of the Committee on Workforce Development and Audit, I am intimately involved with these issues on a ward level and citywide basis every day. Recently, I worked to move the Wrigley Field expansion project forward, which will provide thousands of good-paying jobs without using scarce public funding.**
2. **Education: We are fortunate to have strong schools and dedicated teachers at our schools. CPS recently rated all of our elementary schools 1 or 1+. I have focused heavily on infrastructure projects and worked to bring renovations to every school in the ward. I firmly believe that strong schools are the anchors of any community, and we must continue to invest in them for the future of our children and of our neighborhood.**
3. **Budget and Finance Reform: Residents throughout the ward and City are continually concerned about the fiscal health of the city, state and federal government. Using tax dollars effectively and efficiently so residents get the most for their money is a concern and priority of mine.**