****

**VETTING CANDIDATES**

*Questions from the Illinois Berniecrats*

Answers from Steve Schwartzberg,

Candidate for Congress from the Illinois 5th District

September 12, 2017

RESPOND AND STATE POSITION

1. *Today we live in the richest country in the history of the world, but that reality means little because much of that wealth is controlled by a tiny handful of individuals. To address that, the wealthy and large corporations must pay their fair share.*

We must begin with a vision of the kind of society we want. I believe we want a social democratic society: just, prosperous, ecologically-sound, and self-governed by we the people. Privileged treatment for the rich for more than a generation in the form of preferential tax cuts, preferential bailouts, and preferential treatment generally, have led to a situation in which the take home income of the 1% has more than doubled since 1980. Beyond making the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share, we must seek active measures to promote upward economic mobility for coming generations and to remove obstacles to the revival of the American labor movement. We must invest massively in our nation’s infrastructure and in guaranteeing quality healthcare for all, programs of action that will benefit everyone—including the rich—but which will especially benefit the poor, the working class, and the middle class.

1. *Huge financial institutions must be broken up so they are no longer too big to fail.*

I agree with this entirely. Giant overleveraged institutions were in no small measure responsible for the Great Recession. Even after the “too big to fail” are broken up, our economy will still be vulnerable to the threat of overleveraging. As the liberal capitalist economist Luigi Zingales observes: “By taxing the use of short-term debt (with maturity of less than a year, for example), we can discourage both excessive leverage and short-term leverage…. Also, a 1 percent tax on outstanding short-term debt would raise $21.5 billion annually just among the top nine institutions.” Both for the revenue, and to discourage overleveraging, this tax should still be imposed after the “too big to fail” are broken up.

1. *No one who works 40 hours a week should live in poverty. The minimum livable wage needs to be $15 per hour.*

On January 25, 1950, the minimum wage was increased from 40 cents to 75 cents per hour, an 87.5 percent increase. Some 1.5 million workers were directly affected initially. From December 1949 to December 1950, unemployment fell from 6.6 percent to 4.3 percent and would continue to fall to 3.1 percent in December 1951 and 2.7 percent in December 1952. At a minimum, one can say that this near doubling of the minimum wage was part and parcel of a set of economic policies that worked. On the path to a society in which no one lives in poverty—and certainly not those who work 40 hours a week—we should seek to try that mix of economic policies again. I fully support raising the minimum wage to $15 per hour.

1. *It is critically important to create jobs for disadvantaged young Americans by investing in youth jobs programs.*

This is certainly true and such programs can help to bring the nation together by focusing our attention on the common future of all our youth. From my perspective, youth jobs programs are a logical part of a larger endeavor: a Freedom Budget for the twenty-first century. When A. Philip Randolph first proposed the idea of a Freedom Budget in the 1960s, the idea of a budget that would seek to finance progress toward social justice out of the resources of a growing economy and contribute to its growth, he was focused on ending poverty. I think it’s time for a Freedom Budget for the poor, the working class, and the middle class. The Freedom Budget, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his introduction to that historic document, “is a moral commitment to the fundamental principles on which this nation was founded.” It is time to develop a new Freedom Budget for the twenty-first century and build the consensus necessary to see it adopted and implemented.

1. *Social Security must be expanded so that every American can retire with dignity.*

Income from Social Security is estimated to have reduced poverty among the elderly from about 40 percent to less than 10 percent. It is a remarkable success story. In 2017, the maximum of taxable earnings helping to sustain Social Security was $127,200. Removing this cap and taxing incomes above this would provide sufficient resources to significantly expand the program. I strongly support doing so.

1. *Trade deals like TPP, NAFTA, CAFTA, and PNTR have cost the US thousands of jobs, allowed corporations to shut down operations in the US and move work to low-wage countries where people are forced to work for pennies an hour. We must do everything we can to reverse these effects from current trade deals and ensure we don’t sign on to any more that place corporate profits ahead of working class and poor people in the US and throughout the world.*

I am deeply opposed to a neoliberal vision of globalization as the process of the world becoming a single market, but I support a social democratic vision of globalization as the process of the world becoming a single place. I look forward to a world of social democratic societies cooperating with each other to protect the environment and worker rights and human rights and living in peace.  I see fair trade as part of that process and so while I am opposed to the TPP—and while I am especially opposed to the system of ISDS “courts” in these agreements designed to provide a private “justice” for the rich—I am not opposed to all trade agreements on principle, much less opposed to trade as such.  What I would expect from any agreement that I could support would be that it emerged from a negotiating process in which the labor movements and environmental movements of the countries involved were full partners.

1. *Citizens United, a 5-4 Supreme Court decision, resulted in enabling the wealthiest people and largest corporations in this country to contribute unlimited amounts of money to campaigns. This decision must be overturned and corruption in politics must end. This means fighting to pass a constitutional amendment making it clear that Congress and the states have the power to regulate money in elections. We must also eliminate super PACs and other outside spending abuses and work to aggressively enforce campaign finance rules.*

The Supreme Court’s mistaken decision in *Citizens United* rests on a dismissal of the dangers of corruption, and the appearance of corruption, by big money, of our political processes. As a result of this decision we must either pass a constitutional amendment making it clear that Congress and the states have the power to regulate money in elections or else persuade the Supreme Court that its view of corruption is mistaken. Consider this example: In 1998, Citigroup acquired Travelers insurance, even though the Glass-Steagall Act prohibited such mergers. Travelers’ CEO explained that given conversations with the Fed and the Treasury, they believed “this will not be a problem.” The head of the Treasury was Robert Rubin. Rubin lobbied the House and then left the Treasury as soon as the House gutted Glass-Steagall by a bipartisan vote of 343 to 86. Three months later, Rubin was hired at Citicorp at a salary of $15 million a year, without any operating responsibility.

1. *In order to protect our Democracy we must fight for a publicly financed transparent system of campaign financing that amplifies small donations. We must also ensure that all Americans are guaranteed an effective right to vote.*

I am accepting no corporate PAC donations. Were it legally possible to replace corporate PAC-funding of campaigns with a publicly financed transparent system of campaign financing that amplified small donors, I would embrace such a system in a heartbeat. I hope to raise money primarily from small donors. I favor universal voter registration for every citizen on their eighteenth birthday. As a step in that direction, I favor such measures as automatic voter registration when obtaining a driver’s license. I am also very impressed with Oregon’s vote by mail system and believe it may well serve as the best model for the country as a whole. While seeking to expand the size of the electorate, we must also be diligent in fighting off Republican voter suppression efforts, and in mounting voter registration campaigns, until universal registration is agreed upon and implemented.

1. *Every American who studies hard in school should be allowed to go to college regardless of how much money their parents make and without going deeply in debt. For that we need to work towards making tuition free at public colleges and universities throughout America, stopping the federal government from making a profit on student loans.*

We also need to insure that those already burdened with mountains of debt can refinance their student loans at much lower rates and, if necessary, discharge their student loan debts entirely through bankruptcy. We also need to make sure that those training in professional schools (medicine, law, engineering, etc) are not saddled with mountains of debt either. We must seek to make public universities and colleges tuition free. Private colleges and universities around the country should be shamed into ceasing their practice of favoring the children of alumni—so called “legacy” admissions—a practice that disproportionally benefits the children of the 1% and stifles a traditional path to upward economic mobility. Years of neglect of investing in public K-12 education have exacerbated this situation, as have skyrocketing college costs.

1. *Healthcare is a human right. Our healthcare system needs to work for all of us. We must guarantee healthcare as a right of citizenship by enacting a Medicare for all single payer healthcare system, as well has lowering the price for prescription drugs.*

Passing HR 676 will be an important step in the struggle to insure that quality health care is guaranteed for all the inhabitants of our land, citizens and non-citizens alike, as our right. We must build as strong a consensus in the country as we can that in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world people should not be crushed into bankruptcy by a chance illness, or driven into debt by deductibles and co-pays, or completely denied the care they need by insurance company bureaucrats who are ignorant of the art and science of medicine, or by an inadequate governmental compensation system. I favor having the government bargain with private prescription drug manufacturers to help establish the price of medicines under patent and favor having the government insist, as a condition of doing business with these companies, that they manufacture and sell generic drugs, and that they do so at only slightly more than the cost of production and distribution.

1. *The US infrastructure, from our roads to our bridges, to our dams, waterways and electrical grid have not been properly invested in nor used the advances in technology for maintenance or improvements. America is long overdue to rebuild our crumbling roads, bridges, railways, airports, public transit systems, ports, dams, wastewater plants and other infrastructure needs.*

If we have a barge stopped on the Upper Mississippi because there is a problem with the locks what happens? Commodities just sit there until the problem is fixed. There are no detours, there’s no way to do anything but wait. And waiting costs a lot of money. If we can decrease the tremendous delays in our economy that are caused by poor infrastructure we can increase our productivity and with it the growth of our economy. Nearly 80% of lock sites with commercial traffic had an unexpected outage in 2016. Half of these locks are older than their intended 50-year lifespan. Although they are in better shape than many other parts of our infrastructure, we have almost a hundred and fifty thousand problem bridges in our country. The US infrastructure from our locks and roads and bridges to our dams and waterways and electrical grid, have not been properly invested in or maintained. It’s time for a Marshall Plan for America.

1. *The US defense spending is larger than that of the next seven defense budgets. We must firmly reject any increase to defense spending at the cost of cuts to domestic spending.*

I favor reducing our bloated and excessive defense budget, but I do not favor in any way rhetorically “linking” defense spending to domestic spending as though there were a fixed spending level beyond which the government should not spend. Rather our domestic spending, and our military spending, should each be determined by what we need and what is advantageous. Rather than yet another new aircraft carrier, or fleet of warplanes, we should be investing massively in cybersecurity.

1. *The US must lead the world in tackling climate change if we are to make certain that this planet is habitable for our children and grandchildren. We must transform our energy system away from polluting fossil fuels and towards energy efficiency and sustainability.*

In his book, *Building the New American Economy*, the social democratic economist Jeffrey Sachs writes of the urgent need to “decarbonize” our economy. He writes: “There is nothing ‘shovel ready’ about decarbonization. The challenge combines the technological complexity of the moon shot and the organizational complexity of building the interstate highway system.” Developing and implementing a national plan for the “decarbonization” of our economy is an essential piece of the infrastructure investment we need if we are to help pass on a planet to our children and grandchildren that is habitable.

1. *African-Americans and Latinos are twice as likely to be arrested and almost four times as likely to experience the use of force during encounters with the police. They also comprise well over half of all prisoners, even though African-Americans and Latinos make up approximately one quarter of the total US population. We must change this by de-militarizing our police forces, ban for-profit prisons, turn back from the War on Drugs, eliminate mandatory minimums, and increase investment in programs that help individuals recover from substance abuse and mental health problems.*

We must demilitarize our police forces, train them in de-escalation, ban for-profit prisons, turn back from the War on Drugs, eliminate mandatory minimums, and increase investment in programs that help individuals recover from substance abuse and from mental health problems. Any requirement for bail should be eliminated unless an alleged offender is deemed a threat or a flight risk by a judge. There are 450,000 people in our nation’s jails today pretrial and the vast majority of them are there not because they pose a flight risk or a danger to society, but simply because they can’t afford to post a monetary bond. Prisoners should be provided with opportunities for rehabilitation and, especially, for education. Once they have done their time, former felons should be able to vote. On leaving prison, former prisoners should receive assistance in reentering society.

1. *Despite the central role immigrants play in our economy and in our daily lives, undocumented workers are reviled by some for political gain and shunted into the shadows. It is time for this disgraceful situation to end. We must pave the way for a swift legislative path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants and protect programs like DACA.\**

We must restore the sense of ourselves that we used to have of America as a nation of immigrants. This is who we are and who we want to be: a hospitable people made up of immigrants from every other nation on the planet. One in ten Americans in the private sector are employed by an immigrant-owned business. Reduce the number of immigrants in the United States and economic growth will decline, increase that number and economic growth will increase. We are all in this together and should embrace our common humanity and common destiny as people who love this country. As I once heard Keith Ellison say: our ancestors may have come over on different ships, but we’re all in the same boat now. There must be a swift legislative path to citizenship for all of the undocumented immigrants in the country. They are already part of who we are, but in a second-class status that they do not deserve and that weakens our unity as a nation.

1. *The inhumane deportation machine must be dismantled by ending deportation programs, closing down private detention centers, offering humane treatment and asylum to victims of violence and minors fleeing from dangerous circumstances.\**

Not only do I fully agree with this, I think our conduct on this matter is analogous to the disgraceful internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. I view our conduct as a violation of, at the very least, the spirit of the 14th Amendment with its prohibition on states depriving any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law or denying any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. We must ask ourselves whether we wish to become a police state, or worse, as the irrational fear, and hatred, and dehumanization behind our conduct is the surest way to lose our liberties as American citizens.

1. *The U.S. must move away from a policy of unilateral military action, and toward a policy of emphasizing compassion, diplomacy, and ensuring the decision to go to war is a last resort.\**

I have spent most of my career as an academic advocating the pursuit of an American policy informed by civility—by concern for the common good—and showing how our greatest successes rested on such civility. One of the most important contributions the United States ever made to the cause of social justice in another country was its support for the postwar land reform in Japan. Rather than seek revenge on those who had attacked us in WWII, we sought to make allies of the Japanese people as against the militarist Japanese government that had betrayed them as well as the people of the United States. My article on the subject—“The ‘Soft Peace Boys’: Presurrender Planning and Japanese Land Reform”—is available online for free download. From the Trail of Tears and Death to the invasion of Iraq, the consequences of American incivility and brutality have been disastrous for other peoples and, in the long run, bad for the United States as well.

1. *The U.S. must have a just approach to the Palestinian and Israeli conflict; one that supports Israel’s right to exist and that denounces human rights abuses and crimes against humanity committed by the state of Israel against the Palestinian people.\**

I believe that the Jewish people have a right to national self-determination through the state of Israel and I also believe that the Palestinian people have a right to a state of their own. The time has passed when Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank could be considered as a mere bargaining chip to be surrendered in negotiations, and partially accommodated by land swaps under United Nations Resolution 242, and it is clear that they are part of a misguided and unlawful policy. The United States, in the interest of peace, should offer to help pay for the resettlement of their inhabitants in Israel proper as part of a comprehensive agreement, an agreement that would also formally include a Palestinian relinquishment of any claim on a “right of return” to Israel proper. Such an agreement would mean both sides accepting loss and vulnerability in return for peace. This is the nature of what is normally required to pursue peace in this world.

1. *Do everything possible to ensure pay equity for women.\**

Beyond doing everything possible to ensure pay equity for women, we must begin to address profound structural inequalities in our society in the ways women experience life and particularly old age. Social Security payments to women, for example, take no account of time spent in rearing children, or homemaking, and so are systematically lower than those for men. Some 80 percent of women aged 75 can expect to encounter a major illness without the support of close relatives. This is in contrast with 80 percent of men aged 75 who can expect to have the help of a close relative. Nursing homes and rest homes are disproportionally filled with women and they are particularly subject to abuse. The Trump administration has recently repealed an Obama administration regulation that prevented nursing homes from insisting on binding arbitration of disputes as a condition for admission. This will make an already vulnerable population subject to mistreatment even more vulnerable and mistreated.

1. *Expand and protect the reproductive rights of women\**

I am a strong supporter of Planned Parenthood, believe that birth control should be covered by insurance and readily available in schools, and I am convinced that any decision as to an abortion should be made exclusively between a woman and her doctor. I believe that abortion should be safe, legal, and rare. I personally find the practice repugnant and in the unlikely event that I were ever asked for advice by a friend on the matter—except in the cases of rape and incest and threats to the life of the mother—I would recommend against abortion. But it is clear to me that the only effective and appropriate way to reduce the number of abortions is by increasing the use of contraceptives. Republicans now control so many state legislatures that 87% of American counties have no abortion provider. This is unfair and must be changed.

1. *The United States has made remarkable progress on gay rights in a relatively short amount of time. But there is still much work to be done. In many states, it is still legal to fire someone for being gay. It is legal to deny someone housing for being transgender. That is unacceptable and must change. We must end discrimination in all forms.\**

I am a member of the Human Rights Campaign and favor federal legal protection of LGBT rights so that it would be illegal to fire someone, or deny them public accommodations, for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

1. *The United States must not just honor Native American treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, it must also move away from a relationship of paternalism and control, and toward one of deference and support. That means supporting tribal sovereignty and tribal jurisdiction, honoring the treaties and federal statutes, improving housing and education, as well as by protecting sacred places and Native American cultures.\**

The beginning of justice for the native peoples of America is recognition of the fact that under our own Constitution, as well as under international law, the Indian tribes are entitled to all the rights of foreign states—they have the right to sue states of the United States in the Supreme Court for violations of their treaty rights and to expect that, in seeking to adjudicate, the Supreme Court will rely on international law rather than on what the American Bar Association calls “Federal Indian Law.” The United States is, in my opinion, both morally and legally bound to abide by its word as given to the Indian nations in the treaties it has signed with them. We are obliged to reopen a treaty making process with the native peoples and to cease attempting to rule over them as if they were in any way our subjects or subject to our jurisdiction.

1. *As a nation, we have a moral obligation to provide the best quality care to those who have put their lives on the line to defend us. Taking care of our veterans is a cost of war. The Department of Veterans Affairs must be fully funding and expanded so that every veteran gets the care that they have earned and deserve. Additionally, claim processing, mental health and dental services, and access to the VA must be improved.\**

Our moral obligation to care for our veterans, for those who have sacrificed so much for our country, is fundamental. Beyond the points listed above, such care should include a national commitment to make sure that no veteran is homeless.

1. *Briefly list important local issues included in your platform.\**

I favor Ameya Pawar’s candidacy for Governor and, if we could talk him into it, I would favor Troy Anthony LaRaviere for Mayor of Chicago.