Erica Bray-Parker responses to Chicago Tribune Candidate Questionnaire, October 2026

1. What is the most pressing problem in your district today and what's a key policy you would support to improve the situation?

The soaring costs of groceries, gas, housing, and healthcare are a primary concern for residents of the 47th District and throughout Illinois. Affordability is a priority that I pledge to address in Springfield. I believe the State has an obligation to champion economic prosperity for all of its residents.

This includes addressing affordable housing in a collaborative way that involves local municipalities, county representatives, and state officials as well as developers, taxpayers, and homeowners. One of the toughest decisions during my two terms on the city council involved an apartment complex in the downtown Wheaton business district. Before I voted for the proposal, I took time to research and consider the facts; ask tough questions; and listen to residents, realtors, businesses, the builders, and our city staff to ensure that the opportunity aligned with the needs of Wheaton.

While not currently serving in Springfield, I've already had to consider the impact of state legislation on my community. In May, I joined my fellow Wheaton City Council members to vote for an official resolution expressing our concerns about the proposed BUILD Act. While the primary objective of increasing accessibility to housing for our residents is a key priority, as it was proposed, I saw it as an overreach of state government that could erode the effectiveness of engaged, meaningful collaboration. I encourage the Governor and others working on this legislation to reach out to municipal leaders and seek meaningful input. Affordable housing is a real issue throughout our county and state, and one of my key campaign promises is to build strong collaborative relationships among local, state, and federal officials so we can best serve our common constituents.

Property taxes are also a concern for the residents of the 47th district. In my seven years of leadership serving on the Wheaton City Council, we kept the tax rate flat for six years. This past year, we unanimously voted for a general obligation bond issue to fund the construction of a much-needed fire station and major work on our police station. In my experience, when community members value a service or improvement, they are

willing to pay for it. Each year, we should be committed to finding waste in our government spending, tax loopholes that decrease revenue, and tightening up our budget. As a steward of our tax dollars in Springfield, I will do what I've always done as a local leader: gather information, talk to constituents, and determine what services and infrastructure are vital for a thriving Illinois economy, and work to identify alternative sources of funding.

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2. The investigation into former state Rep. Harry Benton, and the subsequent resignation of Legislative Inspector General Michael McCuskey, has again raised questions about Illinois' system for policing misconduct in the General Assembly. What specific changes, if any, would you support to strengthen the independence and effectiveness of the Legislative Inspector General's office and better protect complainants and witnesses? Please be specific.

Elected officials and public servants have a direct responsibility to the people and their job is to do the work of the people. This is the standard I have held myself to as a 33-year classroom teacher and a 7-year local elected leader. We should be held to the highest ethical standards not just by voters every two or four years, but by strong policies, practices and procedures that are in place and reviewed annually. Misconduct complaints should be taken seriously and investigated by appropriate independent committees. It is clear that the Legislative Ethics Commission needs an improved process as well as improved leadership. With the recent departure of the legislative inspector general, the General Assembly has an opportunity to make changes that hold lawmakers and staff accountable and review and revise the process for filing, reviewing, and acting upon complaints filed. High-quality and effective training for staff on the commission, as well as throughout the General Assembly, is essential. Timelines, a transparent process with an emphasis on the privacy of individuals involved, will build trust in the system. This can only come if the members of the General Assembly prioritize this commission and validate its mission. As a future member of the General Assembly, you have my commitment to do just that.

3. Illinois’ pretrial electronic monitoring system has come under scrutiny following serious crimes allegedly committed by defendants while on home confinement. Do you believe the state’s electronic monitoring laws need to be changed? If so, what specific changes would you support? More broadly, what changes, if any, would you make to Illinois law to improve public safety?

Overall the SAFE-T Act has been a positive change addressing public safety in a fair and just way. Recent statistics show that homicide and violent crime are trending down. While critics of the SAFE-T Act anticipated an increase in crime with its no cash bail provision, that has not happened. The ability to pay should not be a condition for pretrial release. Of course, that doesn’t mean that each individual charged is released; defendants are still detained based on the nature of their crime and past criminal records. And sometimes, those awaiting trial are released on home detention with electronic monitoring devices. This takes the place of former home detention requirements, such as in-person checks or phone calls. Because laws aren’t created in a vacuum, reassessment of electronic monitoring devices, and other provisions of the SAFE-T Act, should involve judges, prosecutors, victims and advocacy groups. In June, the Illinois Supreme Court created the Pretrial Accountability Task Force to do just that. I see the formation of this task force along with the oversight from the Illinois Office of Statewide Pretrial Services as positive steps in ensuring that electronic monitoring devices can be an effective and safe tool for our courts and communities.

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4. House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch is on record supporting approval of a constitutional amendment to impose a 3% income tax surcharge on income above $1 million. Do you support that?

While the state of Illinois is proud to have its 12th credit upgrade and 8th balanced budget, the current funding cuts from the federal government have created giant holes in the budgets of local governments, non-profits, and schools. This creates economic uncertainty as Illinois struggles to assist its most vulnerable populations. In addition, we still need to address infrastructure improvements, property tax relief, and pension obligation payments.

This proposed increase would be specifically based on income that is above and beyond the $1 million mark. All income under $1 million would be taxed at the 4.95% each of us currently pays on our income to the state. If Illinois is to continue to be a thriving state that cares for its people, its infrastructure, its safety, and its economy, we need a new stream of revenue. While this proposed amendment did not advance through the General Assembly in time for the 2026 election, sixty percent of voters supported a similar non-binding advisory referendum in 2024. It posed the question of whether or not voters would support amending the Illinois Constitution to place a 3% tax on income over $1 million to provide property tax relief.

In my experience on the Wheaton City Council, when there is a need and new revenue is clearly directed to support that need, the people will support an increase in tax assessment. Any new state revenue such as a $1 million income tax surcharge, needs to be tied directly to property tax relief, pension debt payments and/or necessary infrastructure work. As with all issues, I look forward to the voice of the people giving us direction.

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5. Would you support a constitutional amendment to reduce the cost of public-sector pensions, which continue to put intense pressure on the state budget? If yes, please be specific on what pension reform should entail.

No. The state addressed rising costs of pension obligations by creating a Tier 2 system for state and municipal employees, teachers, college professors, firefighters, police officers and many more of our neighbors that work in public service in 2011. This debt had been created after decades of mismanagement and lack of funding. We need to continue to pay down our pension obligations, assist our essential government workers

in maintaining living wages and benefits, and make these career paths attractive for future generations and a thriving economy.

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6. The state has been adding $300 million or more to public education each year, but some school districts led by Chicago Public Schools have argued that the state should contribute far more immediately. Some schools have argued the state should contribute more. Do you agree? If so, where would the money come from?

As a 33-year veteran public school teacher in Carol Stream and an active mom in Wheaton, I firmly believe that communities flourish with strong schools and affordable higher education and training. Future generations depend on the knowledge and opportunities provided by local schools. I stand behind legislation that invests in public schools and affordable post-secondary education and creates career opportunities.

For 10 years, the state budget has funded the Evidence-Based Funding program for public schools with the additional goal of providing property tax relief. The EBF model is intended to strengthen all schools while addressing the needs of particular communities. I'm encouraged by the state's financial commitment.

The problem is that most schools don't have the resources they need and are heavily dependent on property taxes. The ultimate goal of our state public school system is to provide all students with the skills needed for higher education, including college and trade schools, so that they can secure high-quality jobs that give them the means to support themselves, expand our economy and stay in Illinois.

It is clear that EBF hasn't gone far enough. In order to adequately support our schools, we must secure alternative funding sources. However, any new funding for schools would need to be directly tied to local property tax relief to assist homeowners and retirees who are being squeezed by their property tax bills. School districts need to demonstrate that these tax dollars are invested wisely by delivering positive student outcomes. In addition the state needs to continue to fund categorical reimbursements and reassess its unfunded mandates on schools, especially given the continued federal

cuts to essential programs such as food assistance to children and special education programs.

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7. What is your view on the major transportation funding package that has resulted in major tax and fee hikes for motorists?

One of the most impactful responsibilities of government is providing and maintaining infrastructure that enhances a thriving economy. My local governing experience has shown me that when the government invests in infrastructure, passes thoughtful zoning, and has systems in place to assist growth of small businesses, the community's economy benefits; residents, visitors, and businesses thrive. In the city of Wheaton, I have a proven record of supporting the multi-year downtown streetscape improvements, Roosevelt Road corridor rezoning plan, and policies that grow both the north and south business districts. I am very proud of that work.

Public transportation is important to our region, as are the labor jobs that are created and expanded by investments in the public transit system. DuPage County has representation on the NITA board, so our community will have a voice as the rollout of this package continues.

The real cost of living issues stem from policies and actions of our current federal administration. Grocery prices are up due to the chaotic and often unnecessary tariff implementations. Gas prices are up because of the ongoing war with Iran and other chaotic foreign policy actions. Working families, retired individuals on fixed incomes, newly graduated college students and others throughout Illinois are very aware of the impact on their day to day lives and when I talk with neighbors at the doors, it is these very federal policies they will vote to put an end to on November 3rd.

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8. What should the state’s role be in regulating emerging AI technologies? Do you have concerns about AI?

As a teacher, contending with the effects of technology usage in the classroom is something I've had to consider and address proactively. The lesson I have learned is that we must be prepared to responsibly integrate technologies into our lives with reasonable safeguards.

AI and the high-level computing abilities it provides for our professional and personal lives are here to stay. I am in favor of Governor Pritzker's recent executive order establishing the Illinois Artificial Intelligence Cabinet. This includes key experts that will review and address best practices, assess risks, propose safeguards and policies to hold companies accountable, propose solutions for the burdens placed on the environment and energy, as we all move into the future of technology.

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9. Data center development has expanded rapidly in Illinois, raising questions about economic development, tax incentives and the demands these facilities place on the electric grid. What policies should the state adopt toward their development and should the state offer incentives?

The challenge is ensuring that common sense guidelines for data centers are in place to protect our resources; the environment; the health of those working in and living near data centers; and our ability to create construction, technical, specialized trade jobs, raise our families and thrive in our communities.

Regulation over data centers needs to be a balance between local control and state-enforced guardrails. Different communities have different needs and interests, and to a certain extent, should be able to negotiate land use as it relates to data centers, but the complexity of this issue requires oversight and uniformity from the state level.

The framework proposed by the POWER Act streamlines many of the complex and challenging decisions individual municipalities face when data centers are proposed in their communities. While I support the autonomy of local governments to make decisions based on the needs of their constituents, data center development is one such instance where the state needs to step in to provide consistency and transparency for how data centers are built and operated; to assess the impact of electric and water usage; and to consider ways in which data centers can utilize renewables to provide

energy to run the their operations. I have a proven record of diligently working to solve complex community issues, and I am committed to digging in and doing the work that assists local communities in their decision making process.