

League of Women Voters of Elmhurst

Candidate Forum Questions – IL District 47 Representative

Jim Caffrey (D)

1. **Last Spring SB 2213 was introduced in the state Senate and is currently in the Rules Committee. It has approximately 50 co-sponsors. The bill maintains existing environmental and worker protections in Illinois as of January 19, 2017, so that if federal minimum standards are lowered, Illinois will not follow suit. Please explain your position on this bill.**

The bill includes a three-year sunset provision and baseline standards for Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Occupational Safety and Health Act, Mine Safety and Health Act and Federal Labor Standards Act. The bill does not prevent the IL legislature from raising standards above the federal levels.

I support the provisions of SB 2213, also known as the Illinois Baseline Protection Act. There are significant and reasonable concerns in our state about possible reductions in federal protections for clean air, clean water, and worker safety by the current administration in Washington. This bill attempts to reduce those fears by maintaining the national standards as established at the beginning of 2017. This bill would maintain those standards without adding any new laws or regulation. It provides clarity and stability for businesses and others who operate in the state. The three-year sunset provision provides balance in the short term while we understand and measure the potential long-term impact from changes by Washington.

I also believe it is important for Illinois to remain a leader in protecting the environment and in worker safety. For example, we don't want the IL EPA to be so weak that it can't react to a situation like what is happening right now in Willowbrook. In that village, a company called Sterigenics is putting out a known carcinogenic into the air called Ethylene Oxide (EtO). This chemical has been proven by the EPA to cause anything from skin and eye irritations, to breast cancer and leukemia. And this release into the air impacts not just Willowbrook, but villages and towns in the area including Hinsdale, Clarendon Hills, Westmont, and Western Springs. All of these communities are located in District 47.

We cannot turn our backs on the people of Illinois even if the federal government does. And no one wants our state to be in a race to the bottom when it comes to protections for our workers, our water, and our air.

2. **Illinois passed HB 40 and Governor Rauner signed it into law. This law protects a women's right to choose in Illinois in the event Roe v Wade is overturned at the Supreme Court level. What is your stand on supporting this fundamental right for women in Illinois?**

I am Pro-Choice, and I supported HB 40. This law guarantees that women's reproductive rights will be protected even if the Supreme Court overturns Roe vs. Wade. It also ensures that women will get health insurance for all of their medical care, not just some of their care, and that basic access to care shouldn't be a privilege based on income. I believe the legislature, and the governor, made the right decision in passing this law.

3. Even with a budget, the state is still spending more money than it has revenues. Important services which were cut during the budget impasse have not been restored. State pension plans are still underfunded. The state's credit rating is still close to junk bond status. How do you plan to remedy the state's fiscal problems?

Illinois has \$7 billion of unpaid bills and \$130 billion in unfunded pension liability. We can't truly invest in education, infrastructure, and human services until we pay down this debt. My plan includes:

- 1. Prioritize the payment of overdue bills**
- 2. Reduce our unfunded pension liability**
- 3. Create a sound retirement system for the future**

1. Prioritizing the payment of overdue bills:

We need to create a 3-to-5-year plan to pay back our overdue bills so that businesses, investors and workers know that debt will end. And then make each year's allocation a mandated line-item in the General Fund.

2. Reduce our unfunded pension liability:

I believe that we should re-amortize our pension debt. Illinois would pay a level amount each year instead of an increasing amount which will absorb over a third of our General Fund discretionary spending by 2045 if nothing changes. This plan requires slightly higher funding in the near term but will save billions over time compared to the current payment schedule. To ensure this plan succeeds, annual pension funding needs to be paid in full each year – no more pension holidays.

3. Create a sound retirement system for the future.

All options should be on the table including traditional pensions, 401K-style plans, and Social Security. The solution should be one that is stable and secure for retirees, and sustainable and affordable for state government.

If we take these three steps, I believe Illinois can rebuild its financial health and our economy can thrive.

4. What is your position on banning the manufacture, sale and possession of assault weapons in IL?

I support a ban on assault weapons. I support practical enforceable laws that keep weapons designed for the battlefield off our streets and out of our communities.

The challenge we face in crafting legislation is that “Assault Weapon” isn’t a true classification of weapons. Instead of trying to create laws built on what an Assault Weapon is or isn’t, we should focus on narrow, defensible restrictions designed to curb lethality like muzzle velocity, magazine capacity, and rate-of-fire.

Now I would like to take a moment to talk about the real problem facing our country as it relates to this issue: our inability as a people to have a meaningful conversation about guns.

Too often Americans have fallen into the camps of “us” vs “them.” We’ve lost nuance and civil debate regarding guns. I want the debate to start anew. I want to assume good intentions with those who may have different opinions than me.

If we can develop trust between one another, I believe that we can make great progress in this country towards protecting families from gun violence and protecting people’s right to own a gun. This statement does not mean that we will suddenly all agree on the issues before us. But if we can learn to understand the other side’s position and why they feel the way they do, I believe that we can find more common ground than we have in the past.

And we can compromise. As I mentioned a moment ago, I support a ban on assault weapons, but I might be willing to let certain categories of assault weapons remain legal if I can get gun rights organizations to compromise on other gun-related legislation. I want to make Illinois safer, and am willing to work with all interested parties so that we can make progress on the issue of gun violence protection. That is how government is supposed to work and how legislation is supposed to be made.

5. What NEW initiatives would you propose to combat the opioid crisis in our communities, given that death by overdose in Illinois is up by 10%?

Illinois needs to combat the opioid crisis from many different angles including the prioritization of treatment over jail, improved prevention education, prescription guidelines, and proper health care coverage.

Fortunately for me and my family, no one has been directly impacted by opioid epidemic. Over the course of the campaign, however, I have canvassed at the home of two different families who each lost a son from an opioid overdose.

One of the families that I met has been gracious enough to share the details about what happened to their son and described ways in which his death could have been prevented. Their research and guidance led me to the following two, new initiatives for reducing opioid overdoses, both of which are related to our prison system:

- 1. Allow prescribed addiction medication - like Suboxone – for an inmate if he get incarcerated.**

Some jails will not allow Suboxone because it is considered a narcotic. The practice of denying life-saving medicine for an addict does not help to reduce the death rate but can actually contribute to it.

2. Begin the parole immediately upon release from jail instead of waiting up to two weeks

Surprisingly, the parole process does not always start right after an inmate has been released. This pause can lead to relapses and overdoses from a lack of oversight during that time period.

In the case of the family I'm describing their son suffered through a horrible withdrawal inside jail without the Suboxone and his body no longer had any tolerance for opioids after he was released. And then without the risk of random drug testing that was part of his parole agreement, the incentive to stay away from opioids was minimized and he relapsed and...you can guess the rest of the story.

These two actions are common sense ways to reduce the number of opioid deaths in one realm of our fight against the opioid epidemic.