

Catholic Conference of Illinois Interview

**Scott Lee Cohen
(Independent)**

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Bold marks a question asked by the interviewer, *italics marks follow-up question.*

Question: Who motivated you to get into politics?

That's the question of the century isn't it? I think that I've always had a desire to help the different communities. My father had a heart attack when I was 18 and my original dream was to become a doctor. When he had his heart attack I was forced to drop out of high school and take over his store. That's the only way the family could survive. From there I actually turned his one store into a chain of stores throughout Chicago. I was very focused on myself and my business and then eventually I had children so I was focused on my children.

When former Governor Rod Blagojevich was implicated in selling the Senate seat, it was at a time when the economy was tanking, when people were starting to feel the pinch. I didn't want to sit on the sidelines anymore; I wanted to voice my opinion and wanted other citizens' voices to be heard. So I formed an organization called "Rod Must Resign." It was calling on the Governor to do the honorable thing and step aside. He was so focused on his legal problems that he couldn't be an effective Governor at that point. I formed this organization by myself and within a week I had two or three hundred people. It showed me how to be a leader, it showed me I had some skills that are needed right now. It was successful in terms of people's voices being heard.

From there I decided I wanted to run for public office and of course he was impeached, and the position of Lieutenant Governor opened up. I did a lot of research to see exactly what the Lieutenant Governor did and what it was all about. It's an office that doesn't get a lot of publicity. People didn't really know what the Lieutenant Governor does other than taking over for the Governor when he goes to jail. Unfortunately it's the truth. I saw the office as a place for economic development, a place where I can work to bring businesses back to Illinois and end some of the suffering. I ran, and as everybody knows we were successful because we brought around a message of leadership that listens. It's important that any leader, boss or official listens. That's something that is lost in our current system and that's what motivates me everyday to go out there and work hard to bring about a new perspective from the underserved in our communities.

Question: Do you have political heroes who inspired you? Who are your heroes?

I think that every person should have a parent as a hero. My father was my hero. It's unfortunate because he died in 1995, I don't think I ever treated him like a hero. He had so much adversity and so much...every time he turned a corner and started to be successful, something happened in his life to knock him down whether it was illness or the riots of 1968, it burned down his store. He had no insurance. He always managed to come back, always; stronger than when they knocked him down. As for political heroes, I think that one of my heroes is former President Bill Clinton. His work as Governor, and President that he did for the poor and the economy helped to turn his state around as well the country, and I look to be up against similar challenges in Illinois. These challenges are not exactly one size fits all, but if I can work to fix the economy in Illinois, we can fix the poverty rate, we can fix the crime rate and we can fix the budget. We must start somewhere and start somewhere now.

Question #1: Ultrasound

Do you support or oppose The Ultrasound Opportunity Act (House Bill 5743), which mandates abortion facilities offer women seeking abortion an opportunity to view an ultrasound of their unborn baby?

Yes, I support it, if a potential mother wants to view the ultrasound, it should be presented. We need to present all options on the table similar to this, including adoption.

On issues like abortion dividing into the strident positions of interest groups:

One of the problems of the legislators and lobbyists and special interest groups is the diverse opinions. I don't care what the issue is; we have got to find a way to work together. And maybe I'm referring more to the Democrats and Republicans who are constantly fighting in Springfield. Nothing is getting done. As an Independent, one of the most important things I bring to the table is the ability to work with the Democrats on side and Republicans on another, as well as the special interest groups and the lobbyists. And this is one of the things that a Democrat or Republican can't offer. They are too beholden on their own part. Until we really sit down and each give and take a little, things are not going to happen in this state for the betterment of the people.

On compromise being almost impossible in the political world on a topic like abortion:

We're going to change that. We have to change. We're going to change the whole mentality and temperament of Springfield. We have to now more than ever. The status quo isn't going to cut it anymore.

On a parental notification law:

I support parental notification, it is necessary for parents to know what is going on with their children. As parents and guardians, parents have a right to know at the very least. In my opinion it is a common sense law.

Question #2: Tuition Vouchers

Do you support or oppose legislation (Senate Bill 2494) offering tuition vouchers to parents of students in underperforming and overcrowded schools so they may choose a quality, state recognized non-public school?

I'm going to expand on that a little bit. We have Gov. Quinn [who] just cut education. We have classrooms in Chicago public schools of 35-40 children. As governor not only do I support this bill, but I'm going to restore the funding that was cut to education. I believe that all children are entitled to a quality education. Let me expand on that too. Let's look at Northbrook high schools, let's look at Highland Park high schools and let's look at Chicago high schools. There's a disparity there and part of that disparity is based on property taxes. The Illinois state lottery was designed and implemented to fund our children's education. It became so lucrative that they took it out of that special fund and put it in the general fund and are paying all kinds of bills with it. If we put it back into the special fund, the disparity between suburban high schools and schools in general, Chicago schools, would close because we wouldn't be relying on property taxes for the basis. Some people will disagree with me and say that if you take it out of the general fund we're going to be more in debt. And I say no.

Let me bring the businesses back to Illinois, which is what I'm running on. Let me end the mismanagement and waste at the state level. And you will see that not only will the funds increase to points that haven't been reached in decades because nobody has focused or concentrated on bringing these businesses back to Illinois. Because the classrooms are so overcrowded, we need to do everything in our power to give these children the opportunity for a good education and if that is provided by these vouchers, so be it. And until I am able to fix what needs to be fixed and then maybe we won't need a voucher system because classrooms will go back to 18-20 students because children will be taught hands-on skills and not just science and arithmetic.

Question#3: Abolition of the Death Penalty

Do you support or oppose the abolition of the death penalty (House Bill 5687)?

I support abolishing the death penalty. We're not God. Human beings don't have the right to take a human being's life. Aside from that there's still the possibility of an innocent person being put to death for a crime he didn't commit, which makes it doubly wrong.

How did you come to that position? Has it been consistent through your whole life?

It has been consistent throughout my life. There was an incident that changed my opinion for a short time. A family member was killed in a stick-up and for a while I thought an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but that makes us no better than them. That's my opinion.

Question #4: Civil Unions/Same-Sex Marriage

Do you support or oppose legislation establishing civil unions for same-sex couples in Illinois (Senate Bill 1716)?

I support civil unions. If a monogamous relationship is established, it presents some stability to society and it's logical to present couples with the same benefits afforded to married couples.

On civil unions impacting religious liberty, such as a religious entity's right to hire and engage in ministries as it sees fit:

That's a good question and I have to be very honest, I haven't thought about that. Listen, I'm not a career politician so there are some issues and when people bring it to light, I like to learn about it. And I'd be more than happy to call you back because I think it's a good point.

It is an interesting question, it really is. And let's be honest, as Governor I have to look at a lot of different possibilities: faith, society. So I'm glad you brought it up and asked the question. My initial response is that any group or organization can hire who they want, without discrimination.

On civil unions/same-sex marriage legislation and court decisions in other states impacting Catholic Charities agencies' ability to provide adoption and foster care services:

Because of same-sex marriage and civil unions? It is wrong at the possibility of giving a child a wonderful life and I'm talking from a here and now perspective. I just think it's a shame and I would hope and pray that there's some way we could work it out between the churches and synagogues and same-sex marriage/civil unions. There's got to be some common ground for all of us. I just think it's up to us to find it.

Question #5: Immigration**Would you support or oppose legislation in Illinois similar to Arizona's law – SB 1070?**

I oppose the Arizona law. The federal government needs to implement some better restrictions on people who are coming in illegally; however, as governor I will not separate families. I will not separate a father from his child, or a mother from her child. Nor will I discriminate because of a people's color, race, and religion. I don't think it's right because somebody looks Hispanic to go up and ask him for his papers. Listen, we're a government; we're not a communist country. People should have rights and liberties and freedom. And the Supreme Court kind of agreed with me because they stopped them from doing that. And I understand people's frustrations because they feel that illegal people, or people coming here illegally, are taking away jobs and costing the taxpayer money. It is an issue that needs to be taken on federally, with a uniform law.

Question: Is there anything you think somebody reading this would want to know about Scott Lee Cohen, or anything you haven't been able to communicate in another outlet?

I say this at every interview and every opportunity that I have, what the questions you've asked are very important and I will never make light of them. But at the same time, you did not ask any questions regarding financial responsibility of the Governor and I think that's as important in other ways. There are people out there that can't afford a house, an apartment, a roof over their family's head because they don't have a job. As important as the moral issues are, we need to elect a government that has the ability to bring back the jobs and put the people back to work.

Now you have to remember that I've been in small business my whole life. Since 2002 the state of Illinois has implemented over 300 fines, fees, and penalties against businesses. If we raise taxes you or the General Assembly will be under the assumption that we're bringing in \$3 or \$4 billion with a one percent increase. What is happening and the reality is that you're driving away businesses from Illinois. So in two years your \$3 billion increase that you thought you got really cost the state \$2 or \$3 billion and lost revenue. I will not raise state income tax and here's why. Just like I said, it drives away the business. But number two, it's hurting the people that need the money the most. A one percent tax increase across the board? But what about the person making \$25,000 a year? Struggling, you want to take another one percent out of his paycheck? No, I won't do it.

With that being said, I guarantee you and it's proven, that by bringing the businesses back to Illinois you are progressively raising money without raising taxes. Now, and this is important, I would love for the people to know this. It's a proven fact again that there's a billion dollars of waste being spent in the state of Illinois. That's waste, mismanagement, and corruption. I want fifty percent of the money I save. If I save a billion dollars I want fifty percent of that to go into an enterprise fund and that money would be used as an incentive to bring businesses back; to build their infrastructure, tax breaks. The state of Texas is number three in job growth; Illinois is 46. Because they have an enterprise fund. There's \$350 million in there. They removed some of their taxes, fees, and fines, and they are a good model for Illinois to look at. We have got to stop restricting business growth in Illinois. That's coming from a businessman. I can't say it enough. I've been in business my whole life. I can't say it enough, neither of my opponents have been in a successful small business and understand how to balance a budget. You cannot spend more than you take in, but Illinois politicians seem to forget that year after year.

When it comes to the actual duties of governor, do you know what the real job of Governor is? I ask this question because people think and the perception and reality of Governor is really different. The real job of Governor is to be the General Manager of Illinois. There are many duties the

Governor has, and the position requires not only deft management skills but the ability to bring people together. Since I am a third party, I have no choice but to work with both sides of an issue to determine the best course for Illinois. We must work to get the state out of the financial crisis that it's in. I'm going to concentrate on lowering the deficit and bringing revenue in creatively. This will impact all aspects of Illinois society. When the unemployment level goes down, so does the poverty rate, and crime. Its important to understand they are interconnected, and we have to stop the same old party politics and fix Illinois now.