

Westword

Yes or No? Coloradans for the Common Good Holds Reverse Mayoral Forum

BENJAMIN NEUFELD MAY 26, 2023 10:12AM



The Coloradans for Common Good mayoral forum at the Bruce Randolph School on May 25. **Benjamin Neufeld**

“If the answer is 'Yes,' we’re going to cheer and applaud,” Joyce Brooks explained at the start of the May 25 mayoral candidate forum hosted by **Coloradans for the Common Good**, which Brooks co-chairs. “If the answer is 'No,’” she continued, “we’ll just be silent and wait for them to elaborate at the end of the section of questions.”

In front of a large audience packed into the Bruce Randolph School cafeteria, the CCG flipped the script on Mike Johnston and Kelly Brough. Rather than ask the candidates what their solutions would be for issues important to communities affiliated with the group, the CCG and its partners came prepared with their own proposals and solutions — then asked the candidates if they would commit to supporting them.

Over the past six months, CCG members had over 1,000 conversations in the community and developed specific proposals to address the concerns that came out of those conversations. "Our candidate is the agenda of issues," said one organizer of the forum, which asked Brough and Johnston to act as voters supporting or opposing the prepared agenda.

Although CCG is non-partisan and says it will not be endorsing a candidate, the questions had a decidedly progressive slant. The group's members include the NAACP of Denver and the Globeville Elyria-Swansea (GES) Coalition, whose mission "is community-driven and based on a shared commitment to economic, racial, and environmental justice," according to its website. Others present at the forum included the NAACP of Boulder, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, Community of Grace Presbyterian Church, B'nai Havurah Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation and El Centro Humanitario.

The nine forum questions were divided into three sections addressing housing, mental health and gun violence, and workers' and immigrant rights. Various CCG moderators asked the questions, to which the candidates were required to answer "Yes" or "No."

According to Denverite, at a May 23 debate it hosted with Colorado Public Radio, the Denver Post and Channel 7, there were a few questions that the candidates did not answer directly. This format did not allow that. "It's important for us to know where each candidate stands on these issues that our communities have put forth," Brooks said.

The first question asked whether the candidates would support the GES Coalition's **Tierra Collectiva GES community land trust** and its plan to develop forty acres of undeveloped land in GES into permanently affordable housing. "Yes," both candidates answered.

The next question: "Many Denver residents live in mobile home parks, but these dwellings are not currently listed as legal habitations under Denver code. Will you commit to adding mobile homes to the City of Denver's code as legal places of residence and extend the mobile home park moratorium if this can't be accomplished before April 2024?" Again, both candidates answered in the affirmative.

For the last housing question, Brough and Johnston were asked if they would "commit to [investing] \$55 million annually in rental assistance; \$10 million annually in eviction legal defense, intake and navigation, and system-wide capacity building; and \$3 million in an evaluation system to ensure dollars are reaching clients effectively."

"Yes," said Brough, while Johnston responded, "I'm committed to the concept; I can't commit to the budget."

"Yes or no?" the moderator repeated, to which Johnston replied, "I'd be a 'No.'"

At the end of each section, the candidates could elaborate on their answers. Brough explained why she supported the rental assistance budget: "It is so much less expensive to keep people housed than to do what we're doing today." Meanwhile, Johnston talked about the city's unaffordability for workers like teachers and committed to building or converting 25,000 housing units into permanently affordable housing.

The next two questions asked if the candidates would convene a meeting with city and school district leadership to discuss "creative solutions" to the mental health crisis affecting Denver Public Schools students and staff, and if they would convene a meeting with CCG and the Denver chief of police to discuss having the Denver Police Department join the National Gun Safety Consortium — which "offers

a non-partisan, non-legislative avenue to make tangible progress on ending gun deaths, suicides, and gun thefts." Both candidates said they would.

Both also said that they would publicly oppose the Kroger/Albertsons merger — which, the related question pointed out, "would likely result in closing of local stores, hurting consumers, workers and retirees in Denver."

Both said they would give subpoena power to the city's labor enforcement team to help combat wage theft. They also committed to ensuring that Denver's **new wage theft law** will cover contractors.

Both candidates supported holding meetings "to discuss the integration of arriving migrants and long-term resident immigrants as productive members of our community."

The final, bonus question asked, "If elected, will you commit to meeting with CCG leaders at our next public meeting on Wednesday, July 12, to hear more stories from our members and further discuss these proposals?"

"Yes," both Brough and Johnston answered.