

## **Newton Congregations and GBIO Forge Political Ties with Next Mayor at Unprecedented Community Event**

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Newton, Mass. ~ In an unprecedented political development and a sign of shifting political power in this Boston suburb, an organization of churches and synagogues obtained commitments for collaboration on their political platform from the two candidates for mayor of Newton this Wednesday, October 14.

State Rep. Ruth Balser and Setti Warren, a former aide to Sen. John Kerry, were addressed by a crowd of over 500 community leaders and concerned citizens representing close to 30 religious institutions from a diverse spectrum of traditions, including the United Church of Christ, Reform, Conservative and Reconstruction Judaism, American Baptist, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Unitarian, Lutheran, and Chinese Evangelical.

The two candidates, who are the finalists to replace Mayor David Cohen in the Nov. 3 election here, said “yes” to each of the specific requests and pledged to meet with Newton Congregations and the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization once he or she is elected to be held accountable to following up and “delivering” on the political demands delivered Wednesday night at Temple Beth Avodah.

“Not since the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, has the community come forward with such strength and solidarity with representatives from all across the city,” said Rabbi Eric Gurvis of Temple Shalom, who is president of the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association and whose synagogue is a member of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

The group called on Newton’s next mayor to expand affordable housing in the city, restore cuts to senior transportation, and enable non-profits to participate in the city’s recycling program. Candidates were also asked to commit to forming a task force on the issue of social and academic stress among youth, continued participation in the METCO program that brings minority youth to Newton schools, and a new policy that Newton’s administration prioritize banking relationships with institutions with a record of responsible lending practices.

“Tonight’s gathering shows how our congregations together can have an impact on the politics of our city and ensure that the life of this community continues to reflect our highest values,” said the Rev. Tony Kill of the Eliot Church of Newton, who delivered an impassioned defense of the METCO program at the event.

The political platform presented Wednesday night was generated from over 100 house meetings organized by congregations throughout the city. This congregational organizing effort has its roots in several well-established political groups.

The Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) is an organization of 55 religious and membership-based institutions across greater Boston, which brings together communities across racial,

ethnic, and religious lines to win victories on issues of common concern at the neighborhood, city, and state-wide level. Many of the synagogues involved in GBIO have organized their congregations with the support of the Jewish Community Relations Council, which engages over a dozen synagogues in Greater Boston in congregation-based community organizing.

“We are honored to be hosting this event. It marks a new way of making things happen in Newton. It’s all about being a part of the solution,” said Rabbi Keith Stern of Temple Beth Avodah, whose congregation recently became involved with GBIO and community organizing.

As Newton’s wide-open campaign for mayor heated up this spring after the incumbent chose not to run again, Newton Congregations, GBIO, and the JCRC came together to discuss making an impact on the agenda of the next mayor. At Wednesday’s Mayoral Accountability Night, the religious community of Newton put itself on the map of the city’s political landscape and made clear it intends to stay there to be a powerful civic voice urging the city of Newton to live up to its values.

For further information, please contact GBIO organizer Lauren Jacobson at 617-694-1396 or [laurenjacobson@gmail.com](mailto:laurenjacobson@gmail.com) or Gary Abramson at [garyabramson@comcast.net](mailto:garyabramson@comcast.net) , 617-686-1444.