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COALITION OF NORMAN ACTIVIST GROUPS PUBLISHES VOTER GUIDE FOR CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, CONDEMNS UNITE NORMAN

[Norman, OK January 18] - A coalition of community members and activist groups have published a voter guide for the upcoming City Council elections on February 9th. The guide includes a coalition statement condemning hate speech, white supremacy, vigilante violence, fascism and authoritarianism, and warning that the group “Unite Norman” and their tactics and views represent a dangerous threat to local representative democracy in Norman. The voter guide can be accessed by visiting <http://www.normanactivists.com/2021-norman-voter-guide/>.

Activist groups endorsing the guide include Norman Activists, Norman Collective for Racial Justice, Norman Community Relief, Norman for All, Red Dirt Collective, SpeakUp Norman, and We Are Norman. The guide includes candidate questionnaires with detailed answers to 11 questions on topics including mask mandates, policing, racial justice, homelessness, environmental justice, and economic development.

Former Ward 5 Councilmember Sereta Wilson stated: “As we try to heal from a global pandemic and a volatile political climate, I want to endorse this voter guide curated by this coalition group of Norman activists. We have seen what it looks like when people in our community actively intimidate, cajole, and threaten elected officials. We all are facing challenging times and threats of violence as have happened nationally and in our local politics threatens our democracy. We have to stand against that.”

Red Dirt Collective made the following statement about their endorsement of the voter guide: “The choices couldn’t be clearer this election. Either we choose to build a new just future, or we double down on immiserating the poor and the working people of Norman for the sake of the rich and overserved. Canvass, vote, and spread the word! A better world is possible if we fight and win, and we can’t afford to lose.”

Norman for All also weighed in: “In these times, it is crucial that the people of Norman know where their potential candidates stand on all issues. Additionally, considering the divisive rhetoric Norman has seen over the past year from several groups with outside funding and direction, Norman For All supports any and all efforts at transparency in the platforms of all potential candidates, as well as making known where they stand on specific issues important to Normanites.”

The coalition groups will continue to work on get-out-the-vote efforts, with a focus on digital events due to the pandemic, and will update the website with more candidate questionnaires in the event more answers are submitted. A virtual voter education event with opportunities for questions from the public is also being planned in partnership with Oklahoma Progress Now.

Coalition Statement:

This voter guide was produced and compiled on a volunteer basis by a group of Norman-based activists, to share information and resources with new voters and concerned residents.

We represent many different views, life experiences, and political priorities but we all agree that this historical moment represents a unique threat to democracy and to public safety, at both a national and local level. We resolutely condemn, without hesitation or exception:

- Hate speech in all its forms
- White supremacy, racism, anti-Semitism and anti-Native attacks on tribal sovereignty and Native peoples and cultures
- Vigilante violence, including the extralegal practices used in the past to maintain Norman as a Sundown Town, the identity-based hate crimes that have increased dramatically under the Trump presidential administration, and politically motivated violence and intimidation directed at elected officials, particularly at women and people of color
- Fascism, authoritarianism, and other ideologies that encourage violations of human rights and the suppression of democracy through systematic targeting of marginalized groups

Given the above, we believe that “Unite Norman” and their tactics and views represent a dangerous threat to local representative democracy in Norman. We are particularly concerned with the use of racist and anti-Semitic threats, dog-whistles, and discriminatory language that creates a hostile environment in public spaces for marginalized people. The harassment and vitriol directed at our elected officials and their family members, especially at women who hold public office, is of grave concern. Our City Council members are essentially volunteers, paid \$100/month to do the formidable job of representing thousands of Norman residents. For our local democracy to work, they should be accountable and accessible to their constituents, but they should never be threatened with physical violence on the street or in City Council chambers, doxxed by city employees including police officers, or made to fear for their physical safety because of a controversial vote. Norman residents should not have to experience discrimination or identity-based harassment in order to participate in their local government.

We are working for:

*Candidates who are accountable to the people they represent, not monied special interests or “law-and-order” authoritarians who want to shut down all discussions of police reform.

*A local government that is accessible and accountable to as many residents as possible, with special efforts made to include marginalized and excluded groups such as the working class, Black, Indigenous, Disabled, and LGBTQ+ and Immigrant communities.

*A culture of meaningful democratic participation and deep investment in the well being of all our neighbors.

This list of questions was collaboratively produced by Norman community members and activists to reflect some of the most pressing issues in municipal government. All candidates running for office were contacted with a request to submit answers to the same eleven questions. Our voter guide will publish their exact statements, to allow the candidates to speak at length on their views, in their own words. Any candidate questionnaires submitted after the publication deadline will be published as soon as possible to make the information available to voters.

Signed,

Norman Activists
 Norman Collective for Racial Justice
 Norman Community Relief
 Norman for All
 Red Dirt Collective
 SpeakUp Norman
 We Are Norman