Denver, Colo. - More than 500 leaders from congregations, educator groups, and civic organizations around the Denver metro area gathered last Thursday night to publicly launch Coloradans for the Common Good, a local organizing strategy affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The Founding Assembly drew leaders from over twenty member institutions, plus a dozen guest institutions, from Denver, Aurora, Commerce City, and Jefferson and Boulder counties.

Dr. Joyce Brooks, education chair of the Colorado NAACP, invited the assembly to engage in a different kind of politics. “The concept of politics has been corrupted to mean partisanship, electioneering, manipulation; we must retrieve its real meaning,” she said. “We are a political organization in the sense that we accept the responsibility to care for our collective life, to make democracy work!”

“We are not relying on special interest groups to define our agenda,” proclaimed Pastor Del Phillips, of the House Worship Center and chairman of the Colorado Black Leadership Coalition, “so we are going to make financial commitments, as member institutions, so that we are our own special interest.” Pastor Del then led a succession of commitments from 20 institutional leaders to fund, grow and participate in the organization.

Coloradans for the Common Good also hosted its first non-partisan School Board Candidates Accountability Session, during which candidates were asked if they would support a series of proposals, ranging from recruitment and retention of teachers of color, investment in students’ social/emotional support, and support for a traditional, comprehensive high school in the Denver far northeast neighborhood. Twelve candidates from Denver, Aurora and JeffCo attended.

“We reached out to the candidates and shared the proposals ahead of time and asked them to be prepared to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no,’” said Shauna Morgan-Sherman, a member of B’nai Havurah. “We don’t endorse candidates, so it’s important that we have clarity on where the candidates stand on our agenda, which is informed by hundreds of conversations with parents and grandparents, teachers and other stakeholders. This is an example of the different kind of politics we want to practice.”

All candidates present* said “Yes” to the proposals on the organization’s agenda of issues.

“Unfortunately, one of the candidates changed his mind the day after,” said Rev. Selena Wright, pastor of Kirk of Bonnie Brae United Church of Christ. “We respect candidates’ right to say yes or no when asked for a commitment; however, as we say in my religious tradition, ‘let your yes be yes, and your no be no.’ Mr. Curcio, DPS candidate for District 5, gave an unequivocal Yes in front of 500 people, when the public light was shining bright, and then posted a video online the next day regretting his public stance. We reached out to Mr. Curcio and have confirmed that he has rescinded his commitment to a subsection of our community-driven agenda. Our leaders are disappointed because voters need to know where he and other candidates stand and whether they can be trusted with their public commitments.”

*From Denver: Scott Baldermann, Radhika Nath & Diana Romero Campbell (D1); Julie Báñuelos, Tony Curcio & Brad Laurvick (D5); Tay Anderson & Alexis Menocal Harrigan (at large). From Aurora: Stephanie Mason & Vicki Reinhard. From JeffCo: Joan Chavez-Lee & Stephanie Schooley.