

Scott Lennon for a Progressive Newton

Michael Zilles, President, Newton Teachers Association

Regardless of one's political allegiance, ideology or zip code, Scott Lennon is clearly the most qualified candidate for Mayor of the City of Newton. He has by far the richest experience and skill as an administrator and financial manager; his passion, enthusiasm for and commitment to Newton are unparalleled; and he has a far broader and deeper understanding of the needs of all of Newton's diverse residents.

But those voters in Newton who call themselves progressive Democrats have even more reason to support Scott.

In a recent candidate debate, three key issues stood out that differentiate Scott Lennon from Ruthanne Fuller: their positions on outsourcing the work of our school custodians, on employee health insurance, and the value of labor unions. ***And it is clear from these differences that Scott Lennon is the candidate who best understands the concerns of working families and has the most progressive and compassionate vision for Newton's future.***

For four years, school custodians have worked without a contract. The School Committee leadership in place up until last January did not negotiate in good faith, refusing to move forward on any issues unless the custodians ceded to them the right to outsource their work. ***Ask Scott whether we should outsource the work of custodians: his answer is an unequivocal no.***

It isn't enough for progressives to worry about the replacement of good middle class jobs with low-paying work elsewhere in the nation; middle class jobs are being threatened right here in Newton, by our own elected leaders, and it creates the same political divisiveness here it creates elsewhere. As a community, we have to care about this, and we have to elect leaders like Scott who will be decisive and firm in their support of working people.

Let's look at another tough local issue that plays against a national background: health insurance. There are no easy answers about how a community can be both fiscally responsible and provide comprehensive health care to its employees, but our leaders must be honest, transparent, and fair-minded.

Scott has said that the costs and benefits of the self-insured plans Newton offers its employees are reviewed every year and compared to those offered by the Government Insurance Commission (GIC)—and every year Newton's self-insured plans prove themselves to be demonstrably better. Ruthanne has said nothing should be taken off the table, and we should reconsider the GIC.

Like everyone, my members care about having health insurance they can count on, offering reasonably priced out-of-pocket expenses and premiums, and access to their chosen medical professionals. The GIC misses on all these counts.

Let's put this in a real context: teacher aides in Newton often earn as little as \$20,000 per year. For them, if we were in the GIC, a major medical emergency could prove catastrophic. Imagine if you were no longer able to see your own provider, an emergency struck your child, she was placed in the care of strangers in a setting with which you were unfamiliar, and you received medical bills that amounted to half your yearly income. That could be their reality.

For progressives, it's not enough to care that, across the nation, millions of Americans can't afford or fear losing their health insurance. We should expect that our elected leaders give full consideration to the human costs of any decision they make here, in Newton, for the working people of Newton.

And here we are at the crux of where Scott's candidacy stands out. In a time when it has somehow become possible to call oneself a progressive while badmouthing labor unions, Scott Lennon is unabashedly proud that he has earned the endorsements of eleven unions, including Newton's Fire, Police, Custodial and Teachers Associations. ***The talented and hard-working people who keep Newton safe and clean and educate its children believe Scott is best qualified to run this city.***

We do not expect him to roll over on the tough issues. ***But we trust Scott to work with us collaboratively and transparently on the tough issues.***

Outsourcing, health insurance policy, collaborating with unions: These issues may not be sexy, but they matter. Taking the right stand on them is a big part of a mayor's job, and it's an important way a mayor shows his or her real progressive bona fides. If our next mayor can't get it right on these crucial issues, all the rest is just grandstanding at best, and pandering at worst. And Scott Lennon gets it right.