



Piscataway Democratic Primary Challengers File Nominating Petitions

Irwin, Johnson, Leibowitz, and Tillman Call for Transparent, Open, and Responsive Government

Piscataway, NJ - Mayoral Candidate Bill Irwin and Council At-Large Candidates Ralph Johnson, Laura Leibowitz, and Kamuela Tillman announced today that they had filed nominating petitions with the Piscataway Township Clerk's Office to have their names placed on the ballot in the 2020 Democratic Primary.

"To Piscataway Democrats, we say that this year you will have a real choice for Mayor and At-Large Council representatives. We are the Democrats on your side, and we believe that our government should work for the interests of all of the people of Piscataway, not the other way around," Irwin said.

Ralph Johnson pointed to a lack of openness and transparency in local government. "Why is it that our Council and Planning and Zoning Board meetings are still not video recorded and put online so that our residents can see their government in action? Recently, instead of putting meetings online as other towns have done to be responsive to social distancing guidelines, they have just cancelled their meetings. Local government needs to be able to function in a time of crisis." Johnson said.

Kamuela Tillman said, "It is important to us that the voices of the people be heard. Too many times you see at Council meetings residents coming with legitimate concerns only to be ignored or shut down by their representatives. We want people to know that we are running to represent them, and that we will always listen to them and be responsive to their needs."

Laura Leibowitz pointed to the recent spate of mistakes in property tax revaluations as evidence that residents needed an honest discussion about tax fairness. "Why are we doing revaluations every year?" asked Leibowitz. "It's absurd. And why can't our leaders give us straight talk about property taxes? They keep talking about 'lowering the tax rate' when everyone knows that lowering the tax rate doesn't mean much when assessments keep going up. The actual amount of municipal taxes paid by the average homeowner has been rising and they know it. We also need to talk about the huge tax breaks being given to developers in the form of PILOT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes) agreements."

Mayoral candidate Bill Irwin served six years on the Piscataway Board of Education, four of which he was the President. During his two terms, he oversaw unprecedented success in the District's fiscal

responsibility, labor relations and student achievement, with the District receiving three Magna Awards from the National School Board Association including the national Grand Prize for the “You, I, We, Inspire” campaign.

At-Large Council candidates Kamuela “Nikki” Tillman and Laura Leibowitz are both special education teachers and both won election as County Committee members as challengers in last year’s Democratic primary. Together, they fought for and won a court ruling that ended a 70-year-old rule that discriminated against women and non-binary candidates. Tillman is an accomplished vocalist and bodybuilder. Leibowitz has served on the boards of the NJ District of Kiwanis International, AttachAvi Autism and Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple. At-Large Council candidate Ralph Johnson, a law enforcement professional and educator, was re-elected to the Piscataway Board of Education for a third term last November and had previously run for Assembly in 2017. After his 2017 campaign, he was removed from his volunteer coaching position with the Piscataway Recreation department by the municipal government, in what he says was a blatant act of retaliation.

“They don’t like it when people exercise their democratic right to run for office,” Johnson said. “They want people to know that if they dare to challenge the powers that be, they will suffer consequences. They want people to be afraid. Do we really want to be governed by fear and intimidation? We say no, and we say that this year Piscataway voters have a choice.”

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