Create the Vote Coalition Meets With Boston Mayoral Candidate and City Councilor-at-Large Felix Arroyo

Candidate would create a line item for the arts in the city budget and expand credit for small business owners, including artists

BOSTON, September 4, 2013—The Create the Vote Coalition announced today that Boston mayoral candidate and Councilor-at-Large Felix Arroyo met with the Coalition Aug. 23.

The Coalition—a collaboration of Boston’s arts, cultural, and creative institutions convened by MASSCreative—met with Arroyo at Celebrity Series. Representatives from the Celebrity Series, Boston Children’s Museum, the Lyric Stage Company of Boston, and Boston Gay Men’s Chorus questioned Arroyo about his vision for the arts in Boston.

Arroyo said that the most important thing the next mayor could do to support the arts was to talk about the arts and the importance of the cultural and creative communities. It was also vital that the next mayor actively brought groups together from all sectors to leverage resources for the creative community.

“None of us is smarter than anyone else, we are all smarter together,” he said. “We need to use the power of convening, which is, in fact, the most powerful thing a mayor can do.”

Arroyo said that he believes that there should a line item for arts and cultural initiatives in the city budget. “If there isn’t a line item, it’s almost like you don’t exist,” Arroyo said.

Noting that Boston spent far less on arts and cultural activities than other cities (less than $2 per person than the $10-$20 per person spent by cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, and Philadelphia), Arroyo added, “For that reason alone the next mayor needs to create a dedicated line item for the arts.”

Arroyo said that artists and cultural non-profits functioned as small businesses and needed access to credit in order to grow. He said that his council legislation, “Invest in Boston,” could be harnessed to aid artists. Under the proposal, the city would require banks that receive city deposits totaling approximately $1 billion to show how they are benefitting the city by lending to small businesses, including artists.
Thriving businesses, including artistic ventures, build community, Arroyo said. “You know what makes neighborhoods safe? Activity and being on the streets, being in the parks makes neighborhoods safe. What brings people out? Festivals. Theaters. Restaurants. Galleries. If you don’t cluster businesses together, you don’t become a destination,” he said. “When our social capital goes up, our crime rates go down.”

Arroyo said that he would like to expand the school day and include art, theater, music, dance, and sports activities in those additional hours so that every student in Boston has access to cultural activities at least twice a week. He noted that access to the arts, both as a participant and as a visitor to a museum, was vital to children’s educational experiences.

Arroyo also talked about the need to reform the city’s permitting process. “Businesses and artists, they all struggle with permitting in the city,” he said. “These things create public good and we should be making it easier, not more difficult for them to succeed.”

Gary Dunning, President and Executive Director of the Celebrity Series, who participated in the meeting with Arroyo, said: “The arts and cultural community is vital to the city’s economic health. We look forward to working with a mayor who understands this and will support our community.”

Craig Coogan, Executive Director of the Boston Gay Men’s Chorus who also participated in the meeting with Arroyo, said: “Our mission, first and foremost, is to create art that moves people. In the process, however, we inevitably end up building stronger communities by connecting people across all sorts of demographic backgrounds, and the city needs that.”

“Creativity is powerful,” added Matt Wilson, executive director of MASSCreative, who facilitated the meeting with Arroyo. “It increases economic activity, boosts educational opportunities for young people, and helps build strong communities. We look forward to collaborating with the next mayor of Boston to support the arts and cultural community in working to its fullest capacity.”

Arroyo was the fifth candidate to meet with the Coalition, which previously interviewed former Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative Executive Director John Barros; state Rep. Marty Walsh; Codman Square Health Center founder Bill Walczak, and District 8 City Councilor Mike Ross.

On September 9, Create the Vote will host the Boston Mayoral Candidate Forum on Arts, Culture, and Creativity. The forum will be moderated by Joyce Kulhawik, President of the Boston Theater Critics Association and JoycesChoices.com, and it will
foster discussion of mayoral candidates’ vision for the arts in Boston. The forum will take place at the Paramount Theatre on Washington Street. All members of the public are invited to attend.

The Create the Vote Coalition will continue to meet with candidates and share with the public what they learn. The Coalition looks forward to learning more details from candidates, including those they have already met with, about how their ideas and initiatives for the arts will be implemented from a policy and funding perspective. For more information about the coalition and the Create the Vote campaign, visit MassCreative.org.

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Founded in 2012, MASSCreative works with creative leaders and entrepreneurs, working artists, arts educators, and arts and cultural supporters to empower creative organizations and the public with a powerful voice to advocate for the resources and support necessary to build vibrant and connected communities.