

## **Brough: Despite Johnston's insinuation, I will fight for Denver's working families**

Johnston implied Brough has not fought for progressive values during a debate for Denver mayor



Channel 7 News anchor Anne Trujillo, left, stands with mayoral candidates Kelly Brough, center, and Mike Johnston, right, during a Denver Mayoral runoff debate in the studios of Channel 7 News on May 23, 2023 in Denver, Colorado. The debate was sponsored by Channel 7 News, The Denver Post, Colorado Public Radio and Denverite. It was moderated by Channel 7 News Anchor Anne Trujillo, Denver Post Reporter Joe Rubino and Denverite Neighborhood reporter Desiree Mathurin. (Photo by Helen H. Richardson/The Denver Post)

By **KELLY BROUGH** | Guest Commentary

PUBLISHED: May 26, 2023 at 10:58 a.m. | UPDATED: May 26, 2023 at 11:00 a.m.

I've shared over 50 debate and forum stages with Michael Johnston in the last 5 months. We can probably repeat each other's talking points, personal stories, and policies. I've been frustrated by an interaction that occurred following the [most recent televised debate](#) hosted by Denver 7, the Denver Post, and CPR.

A few things happened at that debate – I had to correct the record when Michael again incorrectly stated my position on a law regarding law enforcement accountability, I stood quietly while he took a question asked of me, and [in his closing remarks](#), Michael drew a conclusion about my values implying I haven't fought hard enough in "progressive battles for hard-working families."

Honestly, at that point, I had just had enough. Michael Johnston doesn't get to speak for me.

Immediately after we went off air, I confronted him because I won't allow him or anyone else to take my story away from me. The challenges my family faced when I was a kid and then as a single mom are similar to the challenges many Denver families face today. I stand for working families because I am part of a hard-working family.

While Michael was speaking for me and mischaracterizing me and my values, I thought of my mother who raised me on her own after my dad was murdered before my first birthday. I thought of the times when my family scraped by and relied on food stamps and how we worked multiple jobs to get by. I thought of working through high school, often carrying a full-time schedule at the Dairy Queen to save enough to put myself through college. I thought of how hard it was to be a single mom as my girls' dad struggled with addiction and depression, and we lost him to suicide. Those experiences have shaped me and my values.

I reminded Michael of my story and how it's offensive for him to misrepresent my personal values.

I used to feel shame in sharing my life story, but now I see our strength. Most days I feel pride in what my family and I have come through and what we have been able to accomplish. But every once in a while, someone tries to eke in that feeling of shame again. I have to fight against allowing that to happen. And, I won't let people do that to the families in Denver who are struggling with these same issues.

I believe there is no more damaging feeling than shame, which my family felt every time we went to the grocery store and paid with food stamps. I felt it at school when I was a young girl and my lunch ticket was a different color and it signaled to all that I was a "free lunch kid." We felt it each night after dinner when the entire family worked together and cleaned the offices of businesses.

Like every one of us, my struggles have shaped me. And as hard as life can be for all of us, I'm truly thankful. I feel gratitude. I see the challenges many Denver families

who are scraping by to make ends meet face today. Through many of my family's struggles, we have relied on others, including the government, to help us through the hard times. This was our hope.

I support Denver's minimum wage because minimum wages reduce poverty, increase the standard of living, reduce inequities, and boost worker morale, which in turn leads to greater productivity. I also support Denver's paid family leave program which provides workers with up to 8 weeks of leave with 100% of their wages and is free to employees.

I am a first-time candidate who has never been in a position before this race of having to share my life story and demonstrate my values, not my bosses' positions. To have someone speak for me and dishonestly state my values is wrong and erases my story. A story that tells many Denver families that I understand the challenges they face because I have lived it, but even more importantly, that I have the experience to do something about it. I would love nothing more than to prove that Denver is just as resilient and strong as my family.

*Kelly Brough is a candidate for Denver mayor, former Chief of Staff to then-Mayor John Hickenlooper, the first woman to lead the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, and the first woman on-call to plow snow at Stapleton International Airport.*