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Muslim leaders gathered Wednesday in Mineola to denounce the prejudice they perceived in comments from Republican presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson, who said recently that he would not “advocate” for a Muslim in the White House.

Standing on the steps of Nassau County Supreme Court on a sun-splashed morning as Pope Francis made a historic speech on the White House lawn, this group of local Muslims called on politicians from all parties to engage in constructive dialogue amid a disturbing rise in Islamophobia nationwide.

Wednesday’s gathering came three days after GOP president candidate Ben Carson said on NBC’s *Meet the Press*: “I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation. I absolutely would not agree with that.”

On Monday, Carson appeared to double down in a [Facebook post](#) to his nearly 4 million followers on the social media site.

“I could never support a candidate for President of the United States that was Muslim and had not renounced the central tenet of Islam: Sharia Law,” he said.

Carson went on to acknowledge that there are “many peaceful Muslims who do not adhere to these beliefs. But until these tenets are fully renounced...I cannot advocate any Muslim candidate for President.”

But on Tuesday, Carson seemingly [gave his blessing](#) to people of all faiths to run for president as long as they put the Constitution ahead of their beliefs.

CNN reported that fundraising dollars have “[poured in](#)” since the former brain surgeon first made his controversial remarks on television Sunday.

In Mineola on Wednesday, Ali Mirza of Elmont denounced Carson’s comments.

“Politicians should not use us as political footballs,” he said, referring to Carson, who’s now surging in Republican polls after the second GOP debate held last week.

“It is basically a political issue,” Mirza added. “Some people are using whatever they can in order to get attention in the media and to address a very limited group of voters within their party.”

“No religious test should ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States,” Mirza said, quoting the Constitution.

Carson isn’t the only GOP candidate who has drawn attention for his views on Islam. Donald Trump, who is leading in the polls, was criticized last week for placating a questioner at a New Hampshire event who, referring to Muslims, asked: “When can we get rid of them?”

“We’re going to be looking at a lot of different things,” Trump responded.

Long Island civil rights attorney Frederick Brewington, a Christian, stood alongside Muslim leaders Wednesday. He advised Trump and Carson to “stop being ignorant candidates.”

“Don’t remain silent on this issue because your silence bespeaks of your acceptance of this misinformation that is put out concerning our brothers and our sisters who are of the Muslim tradition,” Brewington said in a message to local officials.

“We are rich because of our diversity,” he added.

Carson’s comments drew a strong rebuke nationwide from Democrats and Muslim leaders. Other Republican candidates, like Ted Cruz (R-TX), Jeb Bush, the former Republican governor of Florida, and Marco Rubio (R-FL), [invoked the Constitution](#) when asked if Muslims were fit to sit in the White House.

“The freedom of religion is a founding principle of our nation,” said Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), the first Muslim elected to Congress, in a statement. “For Ben Carson, Donald Trump, or any other Republican politician to suggest that someone of any faith is unfit for our office is out of touch with who we are as a people.”

Rep. Keith Ellison Statement on Recent Comments Made by Several GOP Presidential Candidates

Washington DC - Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) released the following statement after recent comments made by several GOP Presidential Candidates:

“The freedom of religion is a founding principle of our nation. Our Constitution gives this right to all Americans - including elected officials. For Ben Carson, Donald Trump, or any other Republican politician to suggest that someone of any faith is unfit for office is out of touch with who we are as a people. It’s unimaginable that the leading GOP presidential candidates are resorting to fear mongering to benefit their campaigns, and every American should be disturbed that these national figures are engaging in and tolerating blatant acts of religious bigotry.”

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Rep. Keith Ellison

@keithellison

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Every American should be disturbed. My statement on recent comments made by @RealBenCarson & @realDonaldTrump:

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The Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim advocacy group, called on Carson to withdraw from the race.

Mirza invited both the Nassau Republican and Democratic committees to meet with Muslim leaders to discuss community issues.

Both Carson’s and Trump’s comments come one week after a 14-year-old high school student in Texas was [arrested for bringing in a clock](#) he made at home which school officials mistook for a potential bomb. The arrest sparked an outpouring of support for the teen on social media—including an invitation from President Obama to bring his invention to the White House—and accusations of Islamophobia among school officials and police in Texas.

Meanwhile, national security hawks in Congress, such as Rep. Peter King (R-Seaford), have criticized the president’s plan to welcome [thousands of Syrian refugees](#) into the country, citing security concerns. The majority of people fleeing war-torn Syria are Muslim.