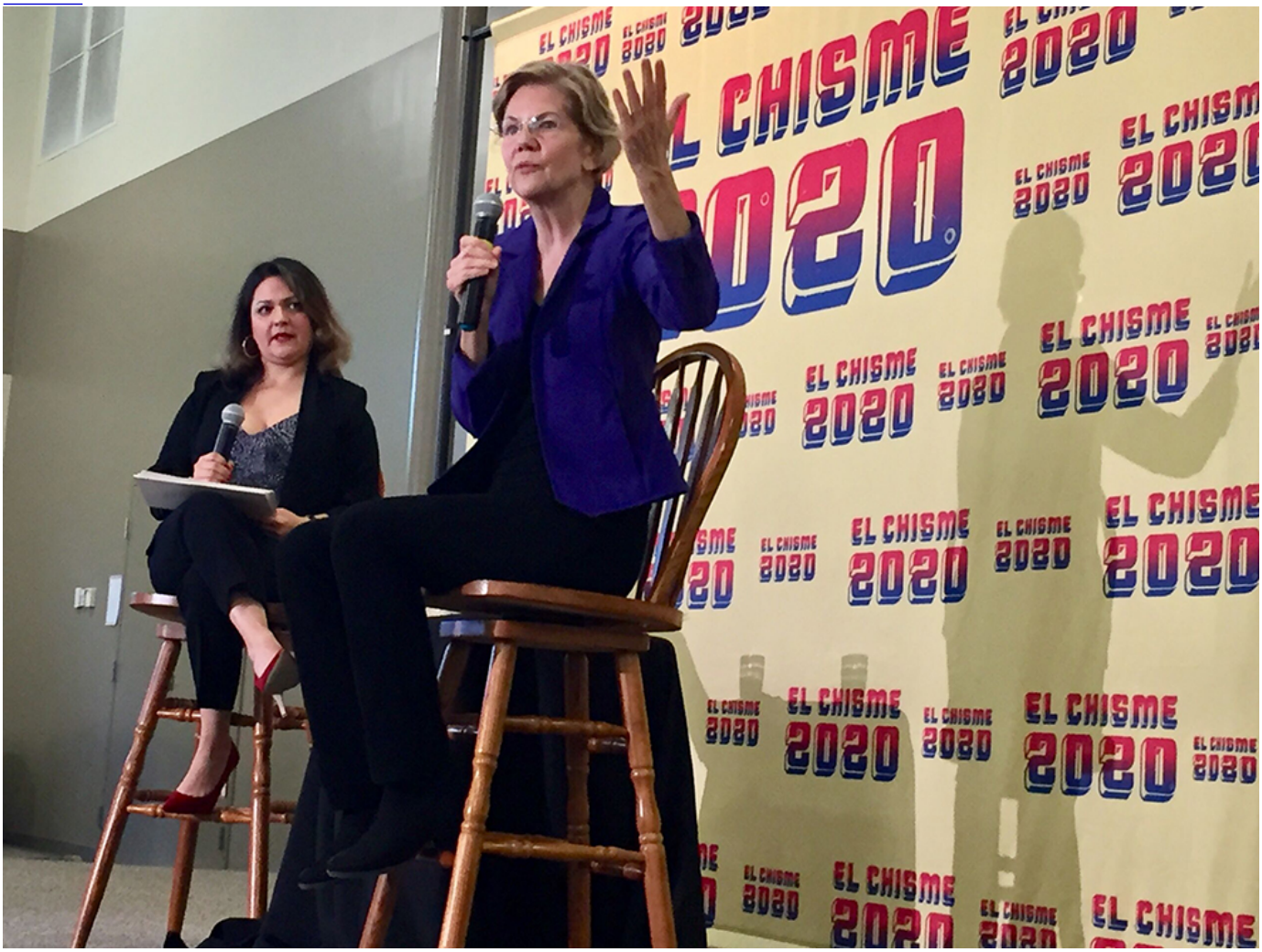
News



Sen. Elizabeth Warren answers a question posed by Priscilla Gonzalez of the advocacy group Mijente. Warren appeared at a church forum in Raleigh, North Carolina, Friday, Nov. 8, 2019. (RNS/ Yonat Shimron)

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Raleigh, N.C. — November 11, 2019
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At a campaign event held at a church that is providing sanctuary to an undocumented immigrant, Sen. Elizabeth Warren on Nov. 8 said she would consider suspending deportations to pressure Congress to come up with a solution to the immigration crisis.

Speaking at Umstead Park United Church of Christ, Warren was grilled about wide-ranging economic and political issues at a forum organized by the national Latino advocacy organization, Mijente.

"I am open to suspending deportations, particularly as a way to push Congress for comprehensive immigration reform," Warren said.

The Massachusetts Democrat was responding to a question from a tearful Rafaela Solano of Winston-Salem, who said her husband was arrested at gunpoint by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and is now being held at Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia.

Speaking in Spanish, Solano asked if Warren were elected if she would pass a moratorium on deportations and if so, whether that would include people like her husband who, she said, served time for a previous drug-related offense.

Warren didn't directly answer the question about immigrants with prior convictions but said she thought ICE had better things to focus on than detaining people based on their immigration status.

"When ICE comes into our communities and takes our neighbors, friends and family members, they do not make this country safer," Warren said. "We need ICE and custom and border patrol to focus on real threats — from terrorism, container ships, contraband, fentanyl."

Warren said she also supported decriminalizing border crossings.

Though Umstead Park United Church of Christ is home to a young, liberal congregation in west Raleigh that has provided Eliseo Jimenez of Greensboro, North Carolina, sanctuary for more than two years, Warren was not asked her views on sanctuary churches or cities. She also got no questions about her faith.

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Jimenez, 41, is a native of Mexico and a father of four who has been living in the U.S. for 24 years. He is one of 46 immigrants facing imminent deportation who are taking sanctuary in churches across the United States, according to Church World Service.

During the one-hour Q&A forum, which drew close to 200 people, many of them Hispanic, Warren was asked about many of her favorite topics: restructuring the American economy to give greater opportunities to people at the margins, reforming corporate governance and a wealth tax on rich Americans.

In response to a question about whether her Medicare for All plan would provide undocumented people access to health care, Warren said it would.

Warren is not the first presidential candidate to speak at a church offering sanctuary to an undocumented immigrant.

Last month, Democratic presidential candidate Julián Castro visited Columbus Mennonite Church in Columbus, Ohio, to meet undocumented Mexican immigrant Edith Espinal, who has been living at the church for two years.

Warren did not meet with Jimenez, though she stopped to pose for a photo with him after the forum and told him, "We have to be in this together."

That seemed to be enough for Jimenez, who said, "She’s great."

Tania Unzueta, policy director for Mijente, said there was not enough time for a question to Warren about sanctuary.

Mijente organized the event as part of a series of forums with presidential candidates titled "El Chisme 2020."

"If we had more time we might have included that," Unzueta said. "We were really interested in the question about a moratorium on deportations. That’s the question we prioritized."