

King-Vaughan candidates hash out the issues at events

By Mark Pavilons

Candidates vying to be the first MPP for King-Vaughan engaged in back-to-back discussions at two local events.

The six candidates in King-Vaughan came together, thanks to the efforts of the King Chamber of Commerce and Concerned Citizens of King Township. These were informative, cordial discussions, with all candidates expressing a genuine commitment for constituents.

Tom Allen, Chamber president, said these candidates deserve credit for their willingness to serve and putting themselves out there. They offer choices and such a choice makes our democracy stronger.

Conservative candidate Stephen Lecce said we can and must do better in this province ? private enterprise is under assault; high corporate taxes and skyrocketing energy rates are impacting the economy. We're resilient and small business has weathered through. They deserve credit, and deserve ?a government that's on your side.?

The Conservatives vow to give business a competitive advantage, and make Ontario a destination for foreign investment.

The main areas of focus of the Conservative platform are to scrap the carbon tax; reduce hydro rates by 12%; create long-term care beds and up funding for mental health.

Liberal Marilyn Iafate, a two-term Vaughan councillor, understands the need to spend within their means, while at the same time, meeting the needs of the community. It's a balancing act, she said, and her council and advocacy work has prepared her for this role.

New Democrat Andrea Beal, a retired teacher and guidance counsellor, said she's been successful in her years of advocacy through decisions by consensus. The NDP this time, have a great platform, that includes increasing pharmacare and dental care; reducing hydro rates by 30%; putting Hydro One back in public hands; ending ?hallway medicine??and increasing day care subsidies.

Revenue for these plans will come from the wealthy, who will be on the receiving end of higher income taxes.

Green Party candidate Greg Locke has worn many hats in the King community and has always been a champion of building sustainable communities. He admitted he's a bit of an underdog in this election, but perhaps it's time for such a change.

Ontarians, he said, have seen all three major parties in power and he's not impressed. He likened the cycles of mainstream party governments to ?rotating chairs on the Titanic.?

He urged people to vote for what's right for ?your children and grandchildren.?

Trillium Party candidate Roman Evtukh said his party has experienced tremendous growth since 2014 and while they're not mainstream just yet, their membership is made up of many former PCs. The party's guiding principles are founded in all constituents having a say in policy decisions.

Evtukh said small business is the backbone of the economy and they would eliminate the carbon tax, which is nothing more than a ?tax grab? and ?job killer.?. They have held this position from the start. He noted the Green?Energy At is not working and businesses should be encouraged, not punished.

?Ordinary guy??Yan Simkin is a first-time candidate with the Libertarian Party. He was a former PC but became disillusioned.

?I?want change,??he said, noting Ontario is the most heavily regulated jurisdiction in North America. He questioned the need for such ?cradle to grave??legislation.

The province's huge bureaucracy has contributed to the debt and ?government spending it out of control.?

Libertarians favour less government and more non-government options, along with repealing many restrictive regulations.

Each party offered their solutions to the suffocating electricity rates in this province.

Lecce pointed out that some constituents are forced to choose between heating or eating. Hydro rates, he said, have risen 300% over the term of the McGuinty-Wynne?Liberals. They're ?shockingly high? and the Conservatives have an achievable plan to reduce rates by 12%, saving the average family \$174 per year.

Iafate said the Liberals have already reduced rates by 25% but we're faced with a hydro infrastructure that's in shambles. It has to be maintained and money has to be spent to bring it up to par. She admitted the Province ?needs to do better? and she said she's not opposed to hydro privatization.

Beal said the NDP?vow to reduce rates by 30% and put Hydro One back into public hands. They are intent on making life more

affordable through many measures, including dental care and pharmacare for everyone.

Locke said the Greens have a developed platform, that includes buying cheap, abundant power from Quebec. They recommend closing the Pickering nuclear plant, saving an estimated \$1 billion per year.

Conversely, Evtukh said nuclear power is clean and cheap. The government, he pointed out, has been wasting money on inefficient green energy and they would repeal the Green Energy Act.

Simkin said the Libertarians, too, would repeal the Act. They would reopen contracts and remove many government appointees to various boards.

As of March 31, 2018, the Ontario government's total debt is projected to be \$348.79 billion. The debt-to-GDP ratio for 2017-2018 is 37.1% and interest on the debt is \$11.97 billion, representing 8% of Ontario's revenue and its fourth-largest spending area.

Ontario's debt has to be paid and the deficit is a real burden. The candidates were asked how their party would deal with Ontario's massive debt.

We can't continue to borrow, Simkin observed, noting we have to look at cheaper power options and get rid of old options that have proven ineffective. We can't solve the debt with a one-size-fits-all approach.

Evtukh said eliminating the carbon tax will boost the economy and that will increase revenues. Trillium would also review the minimum wage to see if it's negatively impacting business.

The Green Party is 'fiscally conservative,' Locke said and 'socially progressive.' They have a fully costed program that balances the books by concentrating on people, jobs and the planet.

Beal said the NDP also has a costed plan but will run a 'small deficit' over the first two to three years. They hope to achieve savings through closing tax loopholes and ask the wealthy to pay more in taxes. They also plan a surcharge on luxury vehicles.

Iafrate said Ontario has enjoyed the highest economic growth under the Liberals and they admit they'll continue running deficits over the next term. With some key initiatives, the deficit will come to an end.

Lecce pointed out we all have to live within our means, and so should the government. The Liberals, he pointed out, have doubled the debt from 2003 to 2018 and Ontario is the most indebted jurisdiction in the world. We spend more on the deficit than we contribute to hospitals in this province and we need fiscal responsibility.

Municipal governments provide essential services but they're stretching tax dollars to deliver those services. How do the parties plan to help municipalities?

Lecce said expanding transit and infrastructure across the GTA will help everyone. He said he met with King councillors early on in his campaign to get their perspective and learn about local needs.

'I will fight every day, for every single dollar that flows into this community,' he vowed.

As a municipal councillor, Iafrate said she knows the burdens faced by local government. The Liberals have committed to improvements to both Highway 400 and Highway 427 and they will continue to promote employment lands locally, to bolster the economy.

Beal said there has been a historic downloading from Queen's Park and the NDP would upload more responsibilities back to the province. Working more closely with the municipalities and funding transit options will help locally.

Locke said municipalities should be given more money and more control over local planning.

The Trillium Party is fiscally responsible and they would cap tax increases to the rate of inflation. They would encourage more business investment and help municipalities develop vacant employment lands. More investment in infrastructure and transit are key.

Simkin said the problem with key infrastructure projects in Ontario is they're always behind schedule and too costly. Libertarians would delegate some responsibilities to the municipalities and de-monopolize the MTO. 'There's plenty of room to think outside the box,' he said.

Health care in Ontario needs a real boost and candidates were asked how they would tackle what's become known as 'hallway medicine.'

Simkin pointed out that every year, some 26,000 Ontarians leave the province for out-of-country health care. If we need to pay for care, we should be spending those dollars here and more private options should be encouraged. In health care, Simkin said roughly half of the budget gets to front-line services, while the other half is eaten up by administration.

Evtukh, a paramedic working in Peel, said health care has been mismanaged and the LHINs have added unnecessary layers to the bureaucracy, leading to too much waste. We need to spend more on primary care, he said.

Locke said the Greens would expand OHIP-plus, expand dental and pharmacare, to put people first.

Beal said the NDP health plan includes increased funding to hospitals and increased money to capital expansions. They vow to add

2,000 more hospital beds and end surgeon salary caps on surgeries.

Iafrate said the new Mackenzie Hospital in Vaughan will dramatically help residents in the riding.

Lecce stressed health care is "at a breaking point" and the Conservatives have a plan to decrease bureaucracies and increase long-term care beds. They also vow to boost funding for autism programs and preserve OHIP-plus.

In a question from the audience, the candidates were asked how they would collaborate, should we end up with a minority government after June 7.

Lecce said they're committed to putting people first, adding "hyper-partisanship" doesn't help anyone. He would fight for his constituents.

Iafrate said she has plenty of experience working with all parties at all levels of government and she's a fan of working together.

Beal pointed out every MPP "has two jobs" to present the party and represent the people. The work often requires crossing party lines and she's a firm believer in working together to solve problems.

The Greens, Locke said, have had to be co-operative over the years and will work with all parties to bring their expertise to bear.

They hope to begin having a real presence at Queen's Park.

Evtukh noted the Trillium Party has no whips, so every MPP is free to vote however they wish on issues.

Parliament, Simkin said, is in need of "fresh voices," and he would support a minority government. Libertarians also don't have a whip and they share some common stances with other parties.

"It takes a village to raise a province," he said.