

CCKT meeting informs King voters

By Mark Pavilons

Three of the candidates in King-Vaughan helped inform local voters, at last week's all-candidates meeting hosted by Concerned Citizens of King Township.

In the cordial, respectful discussion, Liberal incumbent Deb Schulte, Green Party candidate Ann Raney and NDP hopeful Emilio Bernardo-Ciddio discussed issues facing Canadians now and in the coming term.

Conspicuous by their absence were Conservative candidate Anna Roberts and People's Party of Canada candidate Anton Strgacic. Bruce Craig, of CCKT, pointed out the discussion would have been more fulsome had these candidates attended this final debate. Raney said there should be consequences for not showing up.

Schulte said she built a reputation during her term as a problem-solver and she's proud of the results she delivered in the riding. The economy is strong and growing and the Liberals have provided tax relief for middle-income earners.

Bernardo-Ciddio said there are challenges facing all Canadians and he didn't want to sit back and let it happen without providing a voice for younger constituents.

Raney said she's happy to represent a party that is addressing the root causes of our ills, adding they will repair the current patchwork design of our social fabric.

The CCKT provided candidates with three prepared questions.

King Township recently declared a climate emergency and set reduction targets of 45% in carbon and GHGs in 2030. The candidates were asked about their support and sustainability policies.

Schulte said this is a first good step, but a concrete plan is needed to move forward. Her government brought Canadians together on a framework on climate change that includes dozens of measures. If we don't take action, we're all going to pay for it, she stressed.

The Liberals are putting a price on pollution with their carbon tax and they're committed to a net zero emissions increase by 2050.

Bernardo-Ciddio said Canada needs to take the lead and all citizens need to get involved. The NDP plans to address climate change from many different directions.

The Green Party, Raney said, is the only party committed to 60% reduction and a greening of the grid.

The federal government, Schulte pointed out, are involved in disaster mitigation and have helped green York through tree planting measures. They are prepared to do the heavy lifting to meet the targets by 2050.

The candidates were asked about the party's affordable housing measures.

Raney said a national housing strategy will be implemented across the country.

Bernardo-Ciddio said the NDP has many ways to address the issue and will lessen student debt, allowing them into the rental market.

Schulte said the Liberals have developed a national housing strategy and provided funding for regional housing organizations. The feds are partners at the table.

Raney said the housing crisis is even more noticeable in the north and the Greens support boosting rental housing units across the board.

The candidates were pressed on their stance on reducing fossil fuels and investing in sustainable energy.

Schulte said proceeds from the pipeline project will be directed to the local communities to help find sustainable sources of energy. We're moving forward and the country is now in a better place to tackle this issue.

Subsidies may be needed to address green energy, Bernardo-Ciddio noted. They want to help industry convert to greener alternatives.

Raney said the Greens have a big picture approach. We need oil, just don't burn it, she said.

Schulte noted we're getting off of coal and investments have been made in sustainability.

Questions from the audience ranged from foreign aid to support for seniors.

One woman wanted to know how the parties will help seniors stay in their homes longer.

Raney said Greens will increase CPP, ultimately to 50% of income. They also want to grow senior's housing in communities.

Schulte said the seniors caucus resulted in help for seniors, in the areas of housing and health care.

Bernardo-Ciddio said their platform and policies apply to everyone, not just youth and seniors.

Canada has a duty as peacekeepers around the world, and providing foreign aid is necessary, one woman said. She wanted to know the parties' stance on foreign aid.

Schulte said Canada has a duty help other countries stabilize, and we have a responsibility to help education women and girls so they can be contributing members to their country's economy. It's better to spend carefully than make cuts in aid, she said.

Raney said it's time for visionary leadership and there's a greater need today for global cooperation. They favour increasing aid, running opposite to the Conservative plan to cut aid.

Bernardo-Ciddio said cutting aid is wrong and we have to work harder to reduce hatred around the world.

Improving Internet services in rural areas is on many people's minds in King. One woman cited the ultimate catch-22 locally ? she was told her company is going paperless in the new year and all transactions will be done online. She can't do it because her Internet access is inadequate. She wanted to know the parties' commitment to connecting residents.

Schulte said the Liberals have been working on improving connectivity for years and she's personally been pushing for broadband in King. Federal funds have been provided to York and we're starting to see progress in King. The Liberals are creating an environment for more competition, which will lead to better services in the future. Their goal is 95 connectivity by 2026.

The Greens, Raney said, see this is as vital and they plan to infuse millions into improving access.

Bernardo-Ciddio said the NDP have a telecom bill of rights that will address many shortcomings. He pointed out we also need to address the costs, since Canadians are paying the highest rates in the world.

When it comes to aboriginal issues and settlements over the Residential schools matter, Schulte said the Liberals are working diligently and have made great progress in water issues in the north.

Justin Trudeau recently asked to appeal a court ruling that provided payments to indigenous peoples, noting there were some technical issues with the ruling that could set some precedents.

The Greens have budgeted a payout to those impacted by Residential Schools because it's ?the right thing to do.?

Bernardo-Ciddio said the NDP have many policies and strategies to help indigenous peoples in all areas.

When asked about reaching across the aisle and defying party lines, Schulte admitted the Liberals wanted ?to do politics differently.?

On the environment committee, her group released unanimously supported reports, for the first time in a decade. All parties have to come to the table and changes must be made to reduce the embarrassing partisan politics.

Bernardo-Ciddio praised Schulte and Raney, noting they're genuine, cooperative people and the riding is privileged to have such a caliber of candidates. Politics shouldn't be adversarial, he said.

Raney said Elizabeth May has set an example and she makes the greatest attempt to work with all parties. The Greens are often called the ?un-party??and they're structured differently to allow for independent votes.

In her final comments, Raney said the Greens vow to simplify the tax system and their leader May ?knows how to get things fixed.?

Bernardo-Ciddio encouraged residents to vote with their hearts.

Schulte said the race may be close between the Liberals and Conservatives, and she observed many aspects of the Conservatives' plan have been debunked. The Liberals are proud of their accomplishments. We don't have time to fall backwards, she said and we have to keep moving forward.