

Candidates square off at Chamber event

By Mark Pavilons

Candidates vying to be King-Vaughan's next MP all have different party policies. Yet they all agree on several important issues. Helping taxpayers get ahead; providing support for small business and the environment are on every party's agenda.

That was made clear at the all-candidates meeting held last Thursday at King's municipal centre, sponsored by the King Chamber of Commerce.

The four candidates representing the major parties addressed a packed house of residents and answered questions prepared by Chamber members.

Incumbent Liberal MP Deb Schulte said she's spent the past four years 'building relationships' and she lauded residents for making their voices heard. She said she's been able to deliver results for the riding and fight on constituents' behalf. She thanked residents for being a 'strong partner.'

Conservative candidate Anna Roberts, an active community member, wants to be the voice in Ottawa. She said she's seen, first-hand the hardships facing residents and small businesses, due, in large part, to Liberal policies. She stressed we're all working hard, yet not getting ahead and 'we need a change.' The federal government, she said, has to listen to our community and the needs of the people.

Green Party candidate Ann Raney said all parties are recognizing that we're facing a climate emergency. She said one of the impediments to progress is that we're still too partisan and influenced too much by corporations. She said the quality of government today isn't what it used to be and we're suffering from shortsightedness. Our 'patchwork' system needs to be revamped and the Greens have many forward-thinking policies.

NDP candidate Emilio Bernardo-Ciddio, who's been active in the arts and politics, stressed people need to get more involved and he represents the youth voice. He vows to be there for them and he plans to help youth become engaged and informed.

Chamber members crafted five questions, with input from members. Each candidate was asked to respond.

The Chamber wanted to know that policies and support systems each party would implement to help small businesses thrive.

Schulte noted that small business is the economic engine in this county. The government has cut the business tax rate, which is now the lowest of any G7 nation. They also cut red tape and changes to the process to help expedite small business requests. They are helping businesses crack many overseas markets. The Liberals are also removing the swipe fee on credit card transactions, which will save small firms money.

Roberts pointed out the federal carbon tax is killing small business and this alone has hurt job creation. The Conservatives vow to remove the carbon tax and other small business taxes. 'We shouldn't penalize small businesses for taking risks,' she said.

Raney said the Greens would also eliminate red tape and remove duplication and redundancies in the government. Providing a skilled workforce; encouraging innovation; improving transit options and providing students with post-secondary debt forgiveness all spark the economy and benefit small business.

Empowering workers and consumers and freeing up disposable income all help the economy, according to Bernardo-Ciddio.

The Chamber wanted to know how the parties plan to address the crushing debt and deficit, and how they plan to bring in a balanced budget and control government spending.

Roberts pointed out that Justin Trudeau promised to balance the budget when he was elected, but instead his government has added \$71 billion to the debt, which works out to a burden of \$50,000 per household in Canada. This burdens future generations. The Conservatives will live within their means by finding efficiencies and their planned changes won't adversely affect seniors or health care.

'We'll rein in spending,' she said.

Raney said spending needs to be directed to where it's needed - our safety net and health care. Politicians, she said, have lacked courage to make hard decisions. There are times when spending is necessary and the new government will have to implement the costly pharmacare system. The Greens have a plan to balance the budget in their fourth year, by 2024.

Bernardo-Ciddio agreed that spending should be going in the right places and current practices need to be changed.

Schulte said Harper added \$100 billion to the debt in his term and the economy was stalled. The Liberals changed the formula and

invested more money in infrastructure and got the economy going again. Today, Canada's economy is one of the best in the G7 and we're transitioning to a greener and healthier future. The Liberals are committed to keeping the debt to GDP ratio low. The candidates were asked about their climate change policies.

Raney pointed out the Greens are concerned about the future and jobs, not just the environment. Global economies are shifting towards renewable and sustainable systems. It's late in the game, so the government has to do everything to address the climate emergency.

Bernardo-Ciddio said there's no one policy to fix the environment. Improving public transit, education and supporting green energy all improve the economy and the environment.

Schulte defended the carbon tax, noting we have to put a price on pollution to reduce emissions. The Liberals have introduced climate action incentives and they're phasing out coal.

Roberts countered that the carbon tax is making life more expensive for average Canadians, without punishing the big polluters. The Conservatives will push for green technology, green tax credits and green innovations.

The Chamber asked candidates to comment on infrastructure spending and what their parties plan to do.

Bernardo-Ciddio said the NDP fully support increasing access to broadband Internet across the country, especially in rural areas.

Schulte said the feds have made historic investments in infrastructure, including transit, water, waste water systems and, at the same time, strengthening ties with municipalities.

Raney noted infrastructure is critical, but the Liberals failed us and delayed major projects. Gridlock is a major problem today and we have to make transit more affordable and accessible, she said. The Greens vow to contribute 1% of HST revenue to municipalities to help offset infrastructure costs.

The Chamber wanted to know whether the parties plan to change taxation in this country.

Schulte reiterated that the Liberals have lowered the small business taxes and have made measures to simplify the tax system. They want the tax system to be fair across the board, and they will also close loopholes.

Roberts pointed out that small business simply can't afford current tax levels and government imposed regulations that saw increases to CPP and EI. The carbon tax, too, has added another burden.

Raney said the Greens favour removing taxes on everyday essentials and added them to other areas. The party has a fully costed platform and they also favour closing capital gains tax loopholes.

Bernardo-Ciddio said we're already paying too much and we shouldn't be punished by more taxes. Taxing the wealthy and large corporations, he said, isn't punishment.

The organizers opened the floor to questions from the public, which generated a productive discussion.

One man pointed out he moved here from Hamilton and now pays twice as much in rent. He wanted to know what the parties will do to improve affordable housing.

Roberts said she has a financial background and the Conservatives will revamp the stress test for homebuyers, as well as stretch the amortization period to 30 years.

The Greens want more affordable housing and Raney said they encourage converting existing housing to rental units. They also vow to give students a break on their debt payments, which will help them afford apartments.

Bernardo-Ciddio said he feels for young people and the NDP will increase the stock of affordable housing. The key, he said, is also in providing well paid jobs to allow people to afford the cost of living.

The Liberals, Schulte said, are putting measures in place to increase affordable housing. She acknowledged that people are stretched. A balanced budget is on the minds of residents and one man wanted to know how the parties will address our debt.

Bernardo-Ciddio said we're a wealthy nation and fair taxation will strengthen the economy.

Schulte said the Liberals have put more money in the pockets of middle income earners and that stimulates the economy. They're making key investments and always keeping an eye on reducing the deficit.

Roberts said taxing corporations will only reduce jobs and politicians have to be accountable and live within our means. The Conservatives will find efficiencies to reduce the debt.

Raney said the Green platform will see a surplus by 2022-23.

One resident wanted to know what happened to electoral reform, a promise broken by the Trudeau Liberals.

Schulte said they held consultation sessions across the country and the consensus from the public was to keep the status quo.

Roberts pointed out in private corporations if you make promises to the shareholders, you have to keep them. Politicians have to be accountable.

Raney said the Greens have long felt there's too much power in the Prime Minister's Office and they would allow MPs to vote

without toeing the party line. The Greens 'won't whip the vote,' she said, adding they will change what they see as undemocratic processes.

Bernardo-Ciddio said you can't have electoral reform when there's a 39% voter turnout for elections. The key is better education and an emphasis on encouraging the public to participate much more. We can't focus on democracy when 'we're focussed on paying bills and fighting to survive.'

A question of ethics and conduct had the candidates agree that politicians have to be held to higher standards.

Roberts said some of the prime minister's conduct has been unacceptable. The Conservatives vow to implement the No More Cover Up Act, which brings back accountability and transparency.

The Greens place a great deal of importance on the integrity of their MPs and leader.