

Federal candidates square off at event

By Angela Gismondi

Constituents in the newly formed King-Vaughan riding were given the opportunity to meet the candidates for the upcoming federal election at a town hall meeting held at York Pines United Church June 2.

Four participated in the meet the candidates event ? Conservative candidate Konstantin Toubis, Liberal candidate Deb Schulte, Green Party candidate Ann Raney and New Democratic Party candidate Natalie Rizzo.

The candidates were asked to respond to four questions. The first question focused on the candidate's motivation in offering himself or herself for election to the House of Commons.

?For many years, I have been looking at the state of our things in our democracy and it seems that power is going away from the people and to the Prime Minister's office,? said Raney. ?I think there are other things that are very important and we can't do that until we address our democracy ? I feel we're in a very healthy country and those who can participate and do more ought to.?

Toubis said he came to Canada from Russia 20 years ago because Canada was and still is the best place to raise a family.

?I am the only person here who has lived under a government that is so different than the one we have here in Canada,? said Toubis.

?Your government's job is to provide opportunities for every single individual and family ? I want to make sure my children and your children have the same and even more opportunity to be all they can be. I will do everything I can to make Canada the best place in the world to prosper.?

Schulte said she is running because she is confident and ready but also because she is concerned.

?I am worried about the future of our country,? explained Schulte. ?I believe the country is headed in the wrong direction. Our reputation in the world is declining, our environmental and foreign policy record has been eroded, and our economic situation is worsening for the majority of Canadians ? Trudeau has been listening to Canadians and is willing to make necessary changes to Canada Pension Plan, child care, taxes and many other social programs to bring a better balance for the majority of Canadians.?

Rizzo said she represents country's middle class and their interests.

?We are very concerned with what is happening to the middle class in our country,? said Rizzo. ?Employment is not available for the middle class. Students are graduating with a university degree and cannot find jobs. That transition is not easy for our generation. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and the middle class is shrinking.?

She added social justice causes are fundamental to who she is.

?I truly believe a better world is possible for our young people,? concluded Rizzo.

Candidates were also asked what they consider to be the most important issue of the election.

?Jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs,? said Toubis. ?It leads to a strong economy ?The Harper government has successfully fended off one of the worst economic downturns in years. Good management and a steady hand at the head of the ship got us through. We need a government that can manage the country and make sure we have the strongest economy in the world period.?

Schulte also believes jobs are a priority.

?The economy, jobs ? we need them here and we need them now,? said Schulte. ?We all know that Magna has just brought their head office to King. We need more employment opportunities in King. We need important infrastructure in place to allow our communities to attract quality jobs and enhance our important agricultural and rural base. We all know how hard it is to get a job today. I want to be sure our children have opportunities to work right here in our community.?

Rizzo spoke to the severity of growing income polarity in the country. She said the NDP is committed to strengthening the middle class and they plan to do that by creating affordable child care, increasing minimum wage and providing tax credits to small businesses rather than the corporate elite.

?We are in this conundrum because of years and years of mismanagement by the Conservative Party and by their predecessors the Liberals,? said Rizzo.

According to Raney, mitigation of climate change is paramount and that because of the unpredictably ahead, for all Canadians, the economy must become sustainable, resilient, and robust.

?What we know better than any other party is that the climate is going to change,? said Raney. ?The earth's supply is getting low and the demand on it is too high. We have to design an economy based on the fact that the climate is going to change.?

The Green Party wants to reform the tax system to make it fair for all Canadians.

?We want to reduce taxes on things we all want, like income and employment, and we will increase taxes on things we do not want, like pollution that harms people and our environment,? Raney explained.

Candidates were also asked how they envisage serving the constituency if elected.

As a former regional councillor for the City of Vaughan, Schulte believes her experience in municipal politics, as well as her experience on the Greenbelt Task Force and the Oak Ridges Moraine Board will serve her well.

?I am in a unique position among the candidates here today that I have been an elected official and have already had the opportunity to serve the residents of Vaughan and York Region,? Schulte stated. ?The experience has given me valuable skills in how to impact the decision making of government and how to be effective in the political arena. Politics is a bit of a battlefield and those with the experience and skills, the passion and commitment are better able to navigate that environment and achieve results for the community.?

Rizzo said she would be the voice of the people.

?As a Member of Parliament, I would actually represent the constituents and be a voice for the community, not be a voice for the party in the community,? said Rizzo.

She would do that through the use of a constituency office to serve the public and help people work through the bureaucratic process.

Toubis said he is focused on two-way communication.

?I will listen to their concerns, worries and advice and most importantly, I would act on it,? said Toubis. ?When the hard decisions have to be made, I will always recognize who my boss is ? and it is you, the people who give me their vote. King and Vaughan's voice will be heard in Parliament.?

Raney said she will be an agent and an advocate for constituents.

?I have the best leader in the house,? said Raney. ?She has demonstrated that one MP can make a huge difference when they speak on behalf of their constituents ? She listens and that is my job, to listen. I want to be able to speak for you in the House as your ombudsman. I'm you in Ottawa and you need to know about what is going on, unfiltered. The most important thing is to get this information from Ottawa to you and from you to Ottawa. I would put the constituents of Canada first.?

The candidates thanked York Pines United Church for hosting the Meet the Candidates event. A federal election is expected later this year.