

Candidates show their passion at CCKT debate

By Mark Pavilons

From youth jobs and infrastructure to climate change, candidates seeking to become King-Vaughan's first MP showed their passion during last week's all-candidates' meeting.

The event, hosted by Villanova College and organized by Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT), brought together three contenders, who spoke out about issues and defended their party leaders and policies.

Moderated by Councillor Cleve Mortelliti, the panel included Ann Raney, Green Party; Natalie Rizzo, NDP and Deb Schulte, Liberal. Conservative candidate Konstantin Toubis declined the offer to attend.

During her opening remarks, Schulte noted Toubis's absence "doesn't serve the country or community well."

She's worried about the future and economic opportunities for youth. The Conservative government believes tax cuts stimulate the economy, but Schulte countered nothing could be further from the truth.

"Investment grows our economy" as well as taking a more balanced approach on the environment, she charged.

She's running to make government work together and work for the people. She's running to end the divisive attitudes.

"I'm offering hope ... and will fight hard for you in Ottawa," she said.

Rizzo, too, began by saying it's unacceptable that a representative of the prime minister's party didn't attend the debate to share in open, accountable discourse.

As someone who grew up in the riding, Rizzo said she's concerned about her future and about stable, quality employment for young people. Settling down and owning a home in York is a challenge.

The Harper government, she noted, has the worst economic record since the Depression.

Too many young people are out of work; too many seniors are retiring in poverty, and too many parents struggle to afford day care. The NDP have a plan and will invest in innovation, and invest in youth. They have progressive policies that will "repair the Harper damage."

Raney said events like the debate are similar to job interviews. "You don't get the job if you don't show up for the job interview," she stressed, referring to Toubis's absence.

The Green Party is focused on helping to improve the quality of life, protecting farmland, supporting biodiversity and creating long-term sustainability. She's tired of partisan politics that's getting in the way of progress. "I have seen a danger in the way we do politics in Canada," she said.

She's an advocate for eliminating poverty "we should not have a poverty issue."

Greg Locke, chair of CCKT, noted the candidates were given prepared questions before the meeting. The bulk were submitted by CCKT members and one was created by Grade 10 students at Villanova.

When asked about Canada's reputation on the world stage on environmental issues, all of the candidates said we need to do much more.

Rizzo noted in the last 10 years, Canada's environmental policies and governing acts have been devastated and fossil fuel subsidies are proving costly. The NDP, under Thomas Mulcair, will establish a national environmental policy and treat our environment as a public resource. They also want to strengthen environmental protection and put a price on carbon.

Raney said the Green Party has known what to do for a very long time and they have an evidence-based policy to address the issues. They would unleash an "army of contractors" to retrofit all buildings by 2040, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 30%. They, too, would implement a carbon tax and offer funding for developing nations to work on climate issues, since they lack the funding and resources to adequately address the issues and talk about them on the world stage.

The Liberals, Schulte said, believe a strong economy includes a healthy environment. The Liberals vow to create a Pan American panel within 90 days of being elected, to establish global targets. Canada also needs a national framework on the environment and must work with all provinces and territories. She would like to see the teeth put back into the environmental assessment process and restore funding for environmental protection. The Liberals pledge millions for green technology and green infrastructure.

No one is better qualified to represent Canada at the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, than Elizabeth May, Raney stressed. The event is slated for Nov. 30 to Dec. 11.

The King-Vaughan riding includes both rural King and urban Maple. The candidates were asked how they would approach this "juxtaposition" of communities.

Raney said both communities benefit from their proximity to large urban centres and also enjoy access to open spaces. In King, transit seems to be the issue.

Schulte said rural/urban differences need to be respected and she can draw on her experience as a Vaughan regional councillor. She also worked on early greenbelt legislation, as well as the ORMCP, so she has an understanding of rural issues.

Rizzo said she lived in both Maple and King City and she looks to the future generation. Their outlook, sadly, seems bleak because middle class families are falling further behind. The NDP plan to strengthen both the middle class and small business sector, by creating well paid jobs.

When asked about inter-provincial trade barriers and their impacts, Rizzo said Mulcair has a plan to bring the provinces together and open trade talks.

Raney pointed out in our country's infancy there were no trade barriers, and she admitted they do impeded business. She said we have to think about "one Canada" and eliminating red tape.

Schulte pointed out that 70% of our economy is internal trade. Canada is a federation and Ottawa can't dictate to the provinces. She believes a strong federal government is needed that can work with the provinces and encourage one another to lessen these barriers. "We have to work more co-operatively in our approach," she said.

Villanova students wanted to know how the candidates will create more job opportunities for future students and graduates.

Schulte stressed the government doesn't create jobs directly, but the Liberals plan large investments in infrastructure, which creates a climate for job growth and economic confidence. The Liberals will improve access for youth to education and training, and grow our technology sectors. This will all lead to offshooting jobs.

The more money in the hands of the middle class (the engine of the economy) will see a domino effect. A federal youth employment strategy, coupled with changes to student grants, will put more "in the hopper" for students.

Rizzo said the NDP takes youth seriously. She said there aren't enough jobs to accommodate our highly skilled young people and her party plans to invest in small business, paid internships and implement a \$15 per hour federal minimum wage.

Green technology is part of our sustainable future, Raney remarked, noting they plan to slash student debt; eliminate tuition and boost youth employment.

One Maple resident wanted to know about green technology, noting Canada is way behind our European counterparts.

Raney said the plan is to develop our own technology here and focus on Canadian solutions.

There are currently more seniors than there are children in Canada and one King City woman wanted to know how the parties plan to look after the needs of our elderly.

Schulte admitted she's concerned about the financial well being of seniors. The Liberals plan to increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement, for starters.

Rizzo said the NDP have plans to increase CPP benefits, lower the retirement age to 65, boost the GIA and OAS and improve access to home care services.

We need a national seniors' strategy, and the Green Party has one, Raney pointed out. They hope to address financial inequality with their "Guaranteed Livable Income" strategy.

Regarding transit, the Greens have a detailed plan for solutions within the GTA.

Rizzo, as a transit rider, said co-operation with municipalities is key, since roughly 60% of public transit is owned by municipalities.

Schulte said the Liberals plan to spend \$20 billion over the next decade on public transportation. She's a strong supporter for all-way, two-way GO here in King and Vaughan.

One resident reminded the candidates that the newly elected government will have to deal with the sensitive issue of physician assisted suicide. While none of the candidates would offer their view on the matter, they agreed that consultation with the medical field and the public is key in making these difficult decisions.

Dr. Hans Martin, retired scientist with Environment Canada, noted dealing with climate change involves adaptation and we need to move forward on action plans, especially given the upcoming summit in Paris.

Setting targets involves working with the provinces, Schulte said.

The Green Party adopted green policies more than 15 years ago, so they're leaders in this area, Raney pointed out. May worked on the acid rain pact in the 1980s and was instrumental on working to ban CFCs.