

NDP's Yvonne Kelly wants a government that is 'back on track'



By Brock Weir

Some people might feel that being 'hopeful and optimistic in wanting to make things better for everyone' is a bit naïve, but Yvonne Kelly doesn't think so.

For the Newmarket-Aurora Federal NDP candidate, it is 'critical' 'now more than ever' but to make it a reality, the community, and indeed the country, need to take some bold steps.

'Change is something that comes a little bit difficult for people,' says Ms. Kelly. 'We have a really strong cohort of people who have been used to voting Conservative in this riding federally and it is just helping people understand you don't have to stay in place. If you're not satisfied, or you look a little bit more closely to realise things could get better, understand change is not something you fear. Change for the sake of change is not what we're talking about. We're talking about a different direction. We're talking about building a more inclusive community.'

Sometimes, that seems to run counter to an individual's view of what is best for them at any given moment, she says, but when you delve deeper, that is just not the case.

'The more unequal any society becomes, the less healthy it is for everyone,' she says. 'The more isolated you have certain groups of people ' increasing poverty, a million people across Canada using food banks ' there is a growing recognition we don't want it to be this way and maybe there is something we can do about it. As opposed to four years ago, there was discontent, but people weren't as inclined to make a change. Change can be scary for people, but when your back gets pushed up against the wall, eventually people start to say, 'We have got to be able to do things better.'

Ms. Kelly has never been one to shy away from saying just that. The Tottenham resident has been a long-time employee in and around Newmarket and Aurora for several years, working with the York Region District School Board as a community resource facilitator working with local elementary and high schools to form partnerships with agencies and service groups throughout the community. In private practice, the trained social worker uses her skills with step families and blended families, a resource she found was lacking in the community when she married her widowed husband becoming stepmother to his two children.

She first got her feet wet in Newmarket-Aurora politics, working as the campaign manager for the Provincial NDP candidate in the 2011 general election, having connected with candidate Robin Wardlaw through her outreach work with the York Region Food Network.

'The reasons I am actually involved in the NDP are similar to the reasons I have chosen all the different parts of the work I have had in my life: the values of fairness, equality, giving people an opportunity to reach their potential,' she says. I recognize throughout my life that certain groups of people face more barriers and more disadvantages than others. It is that sense of fairness and that sense of 'together we can do more' as opposed to everybody individually trying to get what they need.'

To this end, Ms. Kelly says a Federal Government - namely, an NDP government - needs to work closer with its provincial and municipal counterparts to deliver on vital services. Over the past 10 years, provinces and municipalities have become 'hamstrung' on several issues due to Federal policies, particularly in investments in education to keep the costs of post-secondary tuition manageable, improving healthcare delivery, and enabling the construction of affordable housing across the country.

As she goes door to door across Newmarket-Aurora she is finding, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the economy is top of mind to most voters, especially 'good jobs' - and how to find them - in order to make ends meet. Key in addressing that issue, she says, is the NDP's proposed \$15 minimum wage policy which she believes will incentivize the provinces to raise the minimum wage to keep people with full time jobs above the poverty line.

Affordable housing is also tied into that but increasingly it is becoming a standalone issue for voters, she says. The cost of taking care of homeless people is four times greater than finding them a place to live. More money is spent on police service intervention to keep people alive who don't have housing and that falls to taxpayers as well. For people who say they don't want to pay more taxes, it is a matter of what these taxes are paying for, she says. Investing in housing will mean people will have a quality of life and may be able to get back to work, thus boosting the economy.

'You stay the course when the course is working, but the course isn't working,' says Ms. Kelly. 'Of late, I have heard Mr. Harper say we have to ride this through and eventually oil will come back to where it was and this is a long-term investment strategy, to which I would ask, why are we even on that course? We have resources and we're going to produce those resources and develop them in a way that is as sustainable as possible. But the new course is clean energy and that's what the NDP have stated.'

'Staying the course on two recessions, increasing unemployment, youth graduating with significant debt, people with significant household debt, students unable to find work and collapsing under household debt in general, is this a course we want to stay? I would say no. The tried and true isn't necessarily true. If you're afraid of change and someone plays to that fear, which is what I think is happening mainly with the Conservative message right now, even though we have a Prime Minister who has created this situation we're in, he's the best to get us out of it? I don't buy that.'

'We want to motivate people out of hope and a promise of working together to make things better. I don't want to stay this course.'