

A Green vote is a "lucrative investment", says candidate



By Brock Weir

If everyone who said they "wanted" to vote Green actually did so when it came to marking their ballots, Canada would be in for a wave of change, says Randi Ramdeen, Green Party candidate for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

Many people, she says, simply want to be rid of the present Conservative government and are prepared to just vote for the NDP or Liberals to achieve that end, but by not voting with their heart, they are not going to get the true change they want, she says.

"A healthy government is multiple parties with many different ideas and views on how to run things properly," she says. "I absolutely believe in having opposition as the best way to learn and grow. Voting Green will take a lot of time to really affect things, but we have to start somewhere. In 2008, we didn't have a seat and now we do.

"Taking a stand and voting for policies and a party you truly believe in has to start somewhere and if everybody did, it would make a huge difference."

Ms. Ramdeen, 35, is a native of Prescott, ON. Having moved to Toronto five years ago, she was inspired to get more involved in the political world around her by Green Party leader Elizabeth May. After the 2008 Federal Debates, Ms. Ramdeen says she found a leader who was "on point" with everything she had to say and made the most sense. After doing her research, she found it was a perfect fit for her.

"I started to become more active around the announcement of Bill C-51," she says. "I found it appalling this bill was being proposed and what was most sad is it is taking away the rights of Canadians. As an activist myself fighting for animal rights, I would be considered a target as a potential terrorist. Any activist group who wants to stand up for things they don't feel are right could be considered terrorist, and that is not Canadian. I felt I had to be a part of stopping it [and although it passed] we want to repeal it and I would love to be a part of that change."

Ms. Ramdeen was the final candidate to make it onto the Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill ballot by the end-of-September deadline and although she admits she was "late for the run", she has since been trying to make up for lost time. Door knocking is key to the success of any politician, but increasingly Ms. Ramdeen says she has been finding herself augmenting her campaign speaking to potential voters outside of places like grocery stores.

In that kind of venue, she says she finds it easier to connect with more people at once and encourage a dialogue on the issues that matter to them.

"One thing I am constantly hearing is 'we want job,'" she says. "The Green Party has a lot of great ideas for helping with jobs and one of their main ideas is to think small first. We want to really invest in small business and small business owners to create local jobs. We want to invest in trades like carpenters and electricians to update buildings and homes and save energy. While doing that, as well as investing in education and training programs, we will look at sustainable investments in renewable energy so we can eventually make that shift from that older way of life into a new, sustainable future."

Focusing on "small communities" is a fundamental of the platform, she says, and how every Member of Parliament should conduct themselves. Elected representatives should be the voice of their constituents in Ottawa and she has found comfort in the Green Party not "muzzling" their candidate.

A fully accountable government is also a platform plank Ms. Ramdeen says she is proud to take door-to-door (or to the local grocery store). As she became more involved with politics, she was struck by the Green Party's policy of publishing all their expenses and every receipt online.

"Climate action and making change for a more sustainable future is also something we need, and is an issue that is never going to go away," she says. "Not focusing on it now doesn't make any sense because people are having children and they want better futures for their kids. The earth is finite and if we're not taking care of it, that is all we have. We have to focus on making sure that it is sustainable as possible and make sure the quality of life for our kids is just as good as it was for us."

Looking ahead to the final days of the election, Ms. Ramdeen says a significant hurdle to overcome is strategic voting. A vote for the Green Party, on the other hand, could be strategic as well "but it is just a long-term strategy."

"Loyalty is a big thing and people are sensitive about it," she says. "Many people may not know the other party's stances and may not know they connect better with another party, but they just happen to be party-loyal. The biggest thing is to get people to be non-partisan for a moment."