

## Candidates spar over COVID spending in Chamber debate

Aurora residents had a chance to see their candidates on both sides of the riding border field questions and challenge each other in an all-candidates debate hosted virtually by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

With the exception of the Conservative candidates ? Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill incumbent Conservative candidate Leona Alleslev said she was unable to fit the debate in her schedule but attended a similar event the following evening hosted by the Richmond Hill Board of Trade ? individuals who have stepped up to be on the ballot next Monday, September 20, shared views and volleys for nearly two hours.

As the event was hosted by the Chamber, many of the questions were posed to candidates through a business lens, including how each party's platform will address the national deficit and the how the deficit impacts local businesses and business owners.

First to tackle the issue was People's Party of Canada candidate Anthony Siskos (Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill) who said that Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, as Prime Minister, has created a deficit that has ballooned beyond any of his predecessors.

?We need to move forward responsibly because that is why housing is so expensive, because the Canadian dollar has been debased,? he said. ?Now, a house is \$1 million ? not for our parents though. The Canadian Dollar needs to be restored. We need to really hone in on what it means to pay down this deficit. We as the PPC need to hold taxes as it is. Moving forward, our first mandate will be to lower taxes ? for everyone, for business, for income. It is insulting to go out and say this administration hasn't been completely reckless with our money that we have earned collectively.?

While the Liberal candidates would go on to challenge this idea of ?recklessness?, next up to speak was Newmarket-Aurora independent candidate Dorian Baxter who said tackling the deficit would be his first priority if elected.

?It is a situation whereby our children's children and their children are going to be enslaved,? said Baxter. ?The time has come for all of us to stand on guard for this country of ours financially.?

Libertarian candidate Serge Korovitsyn (Aurora-Oak Ridges- Richmond Hill) said he was for small government and said a way to lower the debt would be to ?fire 90 per cent of the government ministries and government offices.?

?We have been, as a country, creating more ministries, more government employees and everything can be run by the private sector,? he said. ?Once we do that, we have to stop our government babysitting everyone and getting into the lives of the citizens of Canada.?

Following the Libertarian candidate, Liberal candidate Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill) took the PPC candidate's claims head-on, stating the incumbent government tackled ?the largest economic crisis? to face the country since the Great Depression and ?had Canadians' backs.?

?We went into debt for Canadians who couldn't do it,? she said. ?You were criticizing this ? would you have let people go hungry? Would you have let all these small businesses fail? We had to do this. We did the right thing by taking this on. The money wasn't squandered. The money was spent and we already see our economy starting to come back, our jobs returning more quickly, because we did keep money in the economy.?

Added Newmarket-Aurora Liberal candidate Tony Van Bynen: ?The hardship our economy has suffered over the last 18 months has never been seen before. A responsible government is one that makes sure we look after our citizens, we look after our businesses? those that feel we shouldn't have done anything are only reflecting that they truly do not understand the scale and the scope of this country and the values we stand for. I am not one to turn my back on those values.?

Closing out this debate issue were Aurora's two NDP candidates ? Yvonne Kelly of Newmarket-Aurora and Janice Hagan of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill ? and Newmarket-Aurora Green Party candidate Tim Flemming.

Kelly said she agreed with Taylor Roy and Van Bynen, and asked a provocative question of the other party candidates: ?I would like to know what people would have done if they had been in power and who they would have let die??

?I think that deficits and debt are also not something that we just arrive at as a result of the pandemic,? she said. ?Part of what we haven't looked at is revenue sources. The NDP have said the weight of this pandemic cannot be borne on the back of those who have been hit hardest. We need to raise revenues and not cut our programs and services. For many years, we have been told by Liberals and Conservatives both that if we hand out tax cuts to corporations that will translate into business investment and good jobs, and that just doesn't happen. We're talking about a fiscally responsible approach, which is to bring back the corporate tax rate to pre-2010 levels, raise the top marginal tax levels just over \$200,000 by two points, and add a wealth tax in. We also saw corporations in this country become \$78 billion richer in the last year and a half since the first lockdown. That is insane and it is not okay.?

Added Hagan: ?We go into debt to get a house, we go into debt to put our kids through university or college, we go into debt to build a better future. I have been hearing for the last 40 ? 50 years people telling us that our children will be slaves. It is 50 years later and it is not true. The economy has to keep moving and the best way to do that is a fair tax system. Business used to pay 2/3 of the taxes and individuals just about 30 years ago paid the other third and now it is like 80-20 in favour of business. It is just outrageous that they come here and get free health care for their workers, free training, all the benefits that they don't have to pay for, and yet move to another country as quick as they can if they can do it cheaper.?

Flemming agreed that the deficit was ?on an extremely high rate? before the pandemic.

?It is our kids and it is our grandkids. That's why an old guy like me is sitting here very, very concerned. We are on the cusp of a real difficult situation. The Bank of Canada continues to look at their navel because they have to, because we are sitting at a one per cent rate. When that changes, forget the discussion around inflation and housing ? that damages us significantly.?

**By Brock Weir**EditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter