

Climate change puts candidates in hot seat at first meeting

Climate change is a hot-button issue for many voters and each party looking to form Ontario's next government was put in the hot seat for answers last week at Aurora's first all-candidates meeting.

Hosted online by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and moderated by Chamber President & CEO Sandra Ferri on May 11, participants included Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill candidates Catherine Dellerba (Ontario Party), Marjan Kasirlou (Liberal) and Michael Parsa (Progressive Conservative), and Newmarket-Aurora candidates Denis Heng (NDP) Carolina Rodriguez (Green) and, Dr. Sylvain Roy (Liberal).

“Much has been written about the climate emergency facing the world,” said Ms. Ferri. “What are your party's priorities when it comes to climate change and the reduction of carbon emissions, and how will your party support businesses that want to make changes to their operations to mitigate the associated costs?”

The candidates, grouped by riding, responded as follows:

AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL

MICHAEL PARSA (PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE)

“This is something we talked about early on and I remember discussing this in the last election, I said there is so much we can do? every single one of us have a responsibility as individuals, families and businesses, government? every single one of us has a responsibility to do our part. One of the things we can do is? stimulate the economy, invest in our businesses, create good-paying jobs and protecting the environment. Look at the investments in Dofasco just lately. It was a \$500 million investment that is going to create not only well-paying jobs, but it is going to help the environment. By the time this operation is up?they will be moving from coal furnaces into electric options where this move alone is equivalent to removing 1 million cars off our roads. These are the types of investment we should be making to protect the environment but we also create those good-paying jobs in Ontario. It shouldn't be one or the other as it was in the past and that is something that our government is looking at. If you look at the investments being made now in the auto sector, we are going to be the leaders of green cars, making electric cars here in Ontario.”

CATHERINE DELLERBA (ONTARIO PARTY)

“As we know, climate control, emission and the environment is, of course, another hot topic and something that is on the minds of many Ontarians. With regards to environmental issues, we need to put our focus on actions that actually work to ensure we both have cleaner air, healthier soil and fresh water available for all, which is currently not the case. One example of this could be stopping the billions of litres of raw, untreated sewage that is being pumped into our rivers and lakes. How would we do this? The Ontario Party would provide funding to municipalities to help them deal with storm surges, for example, extending the availability of fresh water to all. In addition, we need plans that are not just about taxation without results; we need to stop random taxes that just are imposed on Ontarians that are already at a time when so many of our constituents are suffering with escalating inflation, high energy costs? it doesn't help that on top of rising gas prices there is 11 cents per litre carbon tax which seems to do very little. We need to support those businesses that are putting forth creative ideas to help the environment as well as finding ways to make Canada and specifically Ontario more energy independent which will, in turn, create jobs as well as take care of the environment so that we're not ignoring one without taking care of the other.”

MARJAN KASIRLOU (LIBERAL)

“We will cut carbon emissions by half by 2030 and?will actually bring back the electric vehicle rebate, which had been cut by the Ford government. We will give a \$9,500 rebate for the electric vehicles so people can easily afford the non-luxury electric vehicles. We will also bring 60 per cent? of new passenger vehicles sold by 2030 be zero emission and 100 per cent by 2035. We also will

create an amazing North America battery alliance which will create a lot of jobs and we will be leading in the battery [production] for electric vehicles in North America and will be exporting so much overseas as well.?

NEWMARKET-AURORA

DR. SYLVAIN ROY (LIBERAL)

?Growing up in Northern Ontario?it seemed to me [forest fires] were increasing in intensity and duration, the fears associated with evacuating entire communities and that is only becoming more rampant today. We have to become way more aggressive when it comes to climate change and protecting the environment. Here in the Region, the idea of protecting greenbelt and so much more in terms of even protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine, for example, because that has a critical role in our water supply and so on. I am really proud of our party platform. We're going to be focusing on so much more than the idea of climate change. Planting trees, for example, taking over 400,000 cars off the roads because of the public transit announcement? the investment we will be making, the idea of creating up to 25,000 green jobs, for example?these are things I am really proud about and we do need to do more for the environment and climate change.?

CAROLINA RODRIGUEZ (GREEN PARTY)

?Buildings produce about 24 per cent of our climate pollution in Ontario and energy production is the largest producer of climate pollution. The Green Party aims to tackle those as a priority. We will be transitioning out of (gas) power plants and depending more on renewables, increasing our dependence on renewables is of the utmost importance to us. As for buildings which relate to businesses specifically, we will tackle that issue through retrofitting existing buildings to ensure they are independent from gas usage and only on electric usage, which would significantly decrease the cost of operation and we would also ensure that new buildings are built low carbon from the get-go. Businesses will ultimately save money, families will save money, and these would be funded through a form of grants, no interest loans, and tax credits as well. The most important thing is to phase out fossil fuels. This will significantly decrease the cost at the pump, it would decrease the cost of the general living, and we would also be depending on a lot of increased cycling roads, increased transit, and low-cost transit. We would depend a lot more on a new form of living within our community but the important thing is we need to start fresh now.?

DENIS HENG (NDP)

?I think the biggest thing with climate change and emission outputs is the idea Ontario must do its part to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ? this is something we have ignored in the past. We haven't been making the progress that we need to make to reach the future we want to for our generation, for our next generations. We need to look at the actions of previous governments and say, ?Is this going to get us to where we need to go or do we need to do more?' I believe the government has a proactive role to play in making the environmental choice the easy choice. I think this is something that is correct. I agree with Michael [Parsa that this] idea this should not come at the cost of jobs or an affordable life for everyday Ontarians. The idea here is we need to start making the environmental choice the easy choice, which means from a provincial point of view we need to have the political action to move on changing building codes, to making sure these codes are able to build businesses, the housing, the affordable housing we believe should be investing in getting us to a net zero emission. There are a lot of things we would invest in that other parties have suggested here that we totally agree with. I think the big thing right now is with regards to what previous governments have done [are] half measures, so we would move further.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter