

Climate change spurred NDP's Aaron Brown to take action



By Brock Weir

As a young man of 20, Aaron Brown is concerned about his future ? and what he describes as a ?lack of political action? to do something about it.

He and his peers, he says, see the problems, see what can be done, but when it comes to climate change, ?nothing was being done.?

As such, Mr. Brown, an International Development student at the University of Toronto, decided he wanted to do something about it ? and he did so by throwing his hat into the political arena, carrying the New Democrat (NDP) banner in the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

?There was something not adding up, and that is the political will and the narrative surrounding climate change and the encompassing economic talk around it,? says Mr. Brown. ?I felt like nothing was being done; you see the Prime Minister building a pipeline and saying one thing and acting another way. I thought this was unacceptable and I decided to just run and get that message out there.?

Faced with a few paths forward, Mr. Brown decided that the NDP was a good fit for him because the party's platform not only addresses climate change and environmental issues, but places these issues in a wider context, ?acknowledging the issues and addressing them with a multi-disciplinary lens.?

This wide-ranging view was something that appealed to Mr. Brown, who recently completed a summer placement at the United Nations in New York, working for the Government of Costa Rica, which is well-regarded when it comes to the measures they have put in place to combat climate change.

?There, I saw the importance of the environment and the

future it can hold for everybody," he says. "There, I really saw the importance of it and I [wanted to] bring that back to Canada."

Yet, as he goes door to door in Aurora's south riding, climate change is not the number one issue he is hearing from voters "at least not directly."

Rising to the top, he says, is "a lack of faith in the government."

"A lot of people are just so tired of the same old flipflopping between the Conservatives and the Liberals," he says. "Life gets harder in every election and people are just tired of every promise. With the environment in particular, it is a bit of a special case with Leona [Alleslev] crossing the floor and it definitely has come up many times going door to door and people just feel betrayed. They feel let down by this overall. I have been trying to tell everyone that I am not a politician. I am just a concerned young person. I see all the problems we're facing and I want to actually fight for the solution, not just looking out for the top earners, this top 1 per cent, but actually fighting for people on the ground who are ultimately 99 per cent of this country. People are just tired."

Other issues rising to the top, he adds, are health care, pharmacare, and other areas that are making life less affordable for the average Canadian.

"I don't think I will ever be able to afford a house in this riding by myself and that's the reality I face and all the peers around my age are facing and that shouldn't be the case," says Mr. Brown. "You should be able to afford to stay in the place you've grown up in. You should be able to afford to live close to where you work. You should be able to afford to just stay in a place you have lived your whole life."

"Some policy solutions that the NDP propose are immediately creating 500,000 units of quality affordable housing. That can be through co-ops or other innovative systems, like social or non-profit housing. Looking at housing with a new perspective and a new ideology because young people just can't afford to live anywhere right now. It is not really being picky, it is about getting places people can afford to live in. They don't have to spend all their hard-earned income."

"There was an article released recently that said 30 per cent of people in this riding spend over 50 per cent of their income on housing and utilities, so just things like that, people are being literally drained of all their hard earned income just for a roof over their head and it is really affecting our community. That shouldn't be spent on that, it should be spent on putting it back into the community, buying things and promoting the local economy instead of just straight housing. The creation of 500,000 units will make that faster. We want to have a fast-started funding application so people can apply to create these housing units and it will be streamlined quite quick

to get them up fast. We also want to waive the Federal portion of the GST and HST on the construction of new, affordable rental units: a little bit of an incentive to create affordable housing.?

In the end, however, Mr. Brown says he sees opportunity on the horizon, particularly when it comes to climate change, putting a price on pollution, and leading the charge on fostering green technology and innovations.

?There is a real opportunity for us to become the forefront leaders on this crisis,? he says. ?I can stand at the door and say all these facts that will scare the crap out of everybody, but that's not what they want to hear. It has been nice to say we can actually use this as an opportunity instead of impending doom [and explain how we can] create good jobs and work as a community and bring it together on this issue and really take it back as ours.?