

VOTE 2014: Engagement is key for 22-year-old Council candidate



By Brock Weir

As a student at Queen's University, one of the many things that struck Aurora's Alice Lalas was the motivation driving each student as they took on jobs around campus.

Off campus, she says she experienced something quite different and now she wants to do something about it.

At 22, Ms. Lalas is currently the youngest candidate in the race to be one of Aurora's next councillors. It is a unique position, one she doesn't want to define her campaign, but says it could be a springboard to make a difference.

'I don't want my platform to be just getting youth involved, but it is a huge part of it because of the apathy that reins over youth,' she says. 'This is not going to lead them to a higher class of living, but keep them in the mentality of, 'I'm special, but I am not going to do anything about it.''

A first generation Canadian and a daughter of Polish parents, Ms. Lalas specialized in international affairs at Queen's, partly inspired by her family's journey, but also intrigued by countries in the former USSR which shrugged off communism when she was a young child, as well as youth movements reshaping Europe and the Middle East.

She watches today's crisis in Ukraine anxiously from this perspective.

'If we can get more people involved in issues, maybe we can make a difference with the young people,' she says. 'I went to school looking at an English degree [but moved into] politics because I want to do something that changes policy and changes lives.'

Spurring her in this decision, she says, was learning more about Canada's Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, a trailblazer to be sure, but someone who has occasionally made decisions which conflict with Ms. Lalas' own Conservative views.

'I find the trend with youth often turns towards Liberalism because it seems to serve them better,' she says. 'As they get older, a lot of the partisanship turns towards Conservatives because it benefits them more. [From a provincial perspective], everything has to be in this big public arena where social welfare is just given out to anyone. [The current government] is not really looking at the consequences of what it is doing to citizens. For me, I would just prefer everything to be in the private sector and treat it like the business it is.'

Having graduated last June, Ms. Lalas says she has been looking for her next step after spending the last several months working in local restaurants to help pay down her student debts. Her brother was the first to suggest throwing her hat into the political arena to put to good use both her drive to make a difference and her passion for politics.

She also found inspiration in Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees, who she holds as a role model in engaging people. In researching the current Council climate, she also says she has been impressed with the engagement of Councillor John Gallo through his blog posts, dissecting the political process.

?I think one of the most important things we can do [in politics] is to put it into a medium younger voters might actually embrace,? she says. ?Social media is huge right now, but I don't think a lot of Councillors are broadcasting in the appropriate way. I want to engage youth more often and get them into that group that considers themselves voters because what we do as a Council will directly affect them.

?It is going to be hard, but I think if anyone can get their attention, it is going to be someone who is in that 18 ? 25 year old demographic. They might not want to listen to someone they think has been jaded by politics, looking out for their own interests, the older taxpayer or older people. They might want to listen to someone with a fresh perspective who is in tune with social trends.?

Ms. Lalas is in the midst of seeking a place at Osgoode Hall to pursue her law degree, a venue chosen not only for its reputation, but its proximity to Aurora to continue to serve on Council should she be elected.