

## Aurora candidates share their top priorities at start of election campaign

Canadians are set to go to the polls on September 20.

While the total number of candidates vying to be the next Members of Parliament for the ridings of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill and Newmarket-Aurora is yet to be determined, those who had been confirmed by Monday, August 16, spoke to The Auroran on key issues that have emerged in the lead-up to last Sunday's election call and into the first week of the campaign.

Individuals looking to represent Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill ? the segment of Aurora on the south side of Wellington Street ? are incumbent Conservative Leona Alleslev and Liberal Leah Taylor Roy, two candidates who faced each other in the polls in the fall of 2019.

On the north side of Wellington Street ? the riding of Newmarket-Aurora ? incumbent Liberal Tony Van Bynen is being challenged by Conservative Harold Kim and NDP candidate Yvonne Kelly.

### AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL

?Reprioritize and refocus? is the message Leona Alleslev says she hopes would be a top-of-mind election issue for voters if the election were held today rather than in the second half of next month.

?There were challenges before COVID in our economics, in our trade, in our relationships and even in our own domestic capacity to look after ourselves for critical things,? says Ms. Alleslev. ?COVID has shown that even more. The ballot question is: how are we going to reprioritize and refocus on things for the next five, 10, 15 years, that will position us for self-sufficiency in critical areas, jobs and the economy, and stronger international relationships, diplomatically, militarily and economically.?

The Conservative party, she says, is focused on ?jobs and the economy and making Canada more competitive? and ?restructuring our relationships so we have a greater priority on trade with our allies and friends.?

?And also on our self-sufficiency so for those critical items we can make sure Canada has the capacity and is not dependent on other nations who might not send us stuff,? she continues. ?Certainly, mental health and the health of our society here at home [is] another one of our priorities, [along with fighting] corruption. We're going to put in some more stringent regulations so that we can mitigate the ability to give money through sole source contracts and to your friends with no accountability.?

For Leah Taylor Roy, the pandemic is a top issue ? not only ?why it happened but also how we dealt with it.? Climate change is another issue she says she hopes residents consider going forward.

?I think that we have seen we can work together and really move forward quickly dealing with COVID and we have to do the same thing now with the environmental issue.?

Another issue she says needs to be in the spotlight is senior care and health care in general, as well as helping small and medium-sized businesses get back on their feet.

?I think [the price on pollution] is a huge measure and it has been acknowledged all over the world as one of the most important market mechanisms to try and reduce greenhouse gases. I know there is a lot of dissent in the Conservative party on whether climate change is an issue. We can't afford to have that kind of conversation; the conversation has to all be about how can we move forward quickly, not about [whether it is] an issue.

?I think we're the only viable party with a plan and experience in government to keep moving that forward quickly and we have to move forward quickly at this point.?

## NEWMARKET-AURORA

From the perspective of Yvonne Kelly, the issues of the 2021 election haven't changed all that much since the last time Canadians went to the polls.

That being said, however, each passing year has shown how affordability for everything has become a crucial issue and one that has only been magnified by the global pandemic.

Housing affordability, income and just being able to support your basic needs has become even more of an obvious issue for Newmarket-Aurora, she says. People were looking forward to pharmacare because it is also an issue that affects people's pocketbooks and they want to take care of themselves and their health. I also really hope that top of mind is clean water for Indigenous people and just Truth & Reconciliation in general because it has just been too long and people are more aware now of the atrocities that happened.

People were lucky to have a minority government because our party really made sure the Trudeau government did increase CERB to something that made it possible for people to survive without income, without employment, and also increased benefits in term of EI and the wage supplement for businesses to be able to make sure they weren't going to lose everything as well. Your actions speak louder than your words.

In his first Federal campaign, Harold Kim says the number one issue that comes to his mind in the first week of the election is leadership.

I think in the last six years, Trudeau has been more busy hobnobbing with the rich and famous and the global dignitaries as opposed to focusing on being a strong leader here in Canada, he says. We need to turn this crisis around, we need to start getting Canada ready to face these crises as a country and not be at the mercy of the good graces of other countries. Leadership is important. We need someone who is credible, who other countries respect. Where are we with the Two Michaels? Why were we last to sign United States-Mexico-Canada [trade] agreement? It is the lack of leadership.

At the riding level, weathering the pandemic is an issue he says has risen to the top, including being prepared for the fourth wave. Integral in that, he says, is producing vaccines in Canada a pillar of the Conservative plan.

The Conservatives have a plan that addresses all the concerns of Canadians that keep them awake at night. It is COVID and getting through COVID, but when that begins to improve, it will be back to the things that matter beyond these extraneous events, things like the economy, taxes, jobs and get people back on their feet.

Recovery from the pandemic is also a top issue for Tony Van Bynen and one which he says the Liberal party comes into the race with a track record.

First and foremost, it is recovery from the pandemic how well have we done? he says. Climate change is top of mind with many of the people we have been talking to. Long term care is a very significant issue in how we can make sure that we reinforce how we value our seniors and how we care for our seniors.

What the pandemic has done has laid bare some of the things that maybe the previous economy cloaked. We have become very aware of some areas that need some attention like making it right with our Indigenous community, making it right with racialized Canadians, people who were compromised their need to go to work because they couldn't afford not to go to work. There are a lot of social support programs that need to be reviewed and need to be considered going forward.

We have made a lot of progress. Have we accomplished everything? No, but I think we have clearly demonstrated our commitment to go forward with these things and I think seeking a mandate to get the job done is an important part of this election.

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter