

Ballard, Twinney take unpaid leave from Council for provincial race



By Brock Weir

The race is on.

After NDP leader Andrea Horwath announced Thursday her party would not be supporting the Liberal Government's budget on Thursday, Premier Kathleen Wynne went to Lieutenant-Governor David Onley to call a general election for Thursday, June 12.

At press time, there are three confirmed candidates vying for your vote. Councillor Chris Ballard of Aurora will be carrying the Ontario Liberal banner in the race, while Newmarket's Councillor Jane Twinney will pick up where veteran MPP Frank Klees leaves off as the Progressive Conservative candidate.

Perennial candidate Dorian Baxter will run as a member of the Canadians' Choice Party, an umbrella party for otherwise independent candidates but the NDP and Green Party have yet to fill their spots.

The election leaves the two Councillors in the unique situation of sitting on their respective municipal councils while seeking the provincial job. Both are expected to take unpaid leaves of absences for the duration of the race.

"When you are working on a campaign, you want to focus on that," said Ms. Twinney, made her intentions known at Newmarket Council on Monday night.

Mr. Ballard was expected to receive the green light from Aurora on Tuesday evening.

"I can say there are a number of important issues I am concerned about as a Councillor, and ensure those move along, but I will be staying in touch with my fellow Councillors to ensure I am up to date with what is happening," he said. "In the five weeks the campaign is underway, my focus will be on [the election]. I look forward to serving the residents of Aurora in a higher level of government.

"So many of the issues that have been put before me over the last three-and-a-half years have been provincial issue the Town has no jurisdiction over, whether it is illegal fill or transportation. I would really like to work on those files as an MPP."

Since the writ was dropped on Friday, neither candidate wasted any time in getting their campaigns going. In fact, both have been making the rounds and doing their door knockings well in advance of Friday. With several events going on in and around Aurora, there was no shortage of places to meet and greet people on the campaign trail, although the rainy weather made canvassing soggy.

This past weekend, however, as details of the 2014 Ontario Budget were absorbed, both candidates say they have come away with

clear messages.

"I have heard a lot of enthusiasm for Kathleen Wynne and her ideas," says Mr. Ballard. "People are happy with the focus on jobs and the economy. They are happy with the plans around transit, improved transit, improved transportation, and a lot of people are happy with the pension reform Kathleen Wynne has put forward."

Mr. Ballard also said he was receiving positive feedback about provisions proposed for healthcare and education, employment, and infrastructure.

"By and large, people don't want a return to the slash and burn era with all the upheaval at schools and within the health care system that entails," he says. "They feel Kathleen Wynne has a slow and steady hand in steering this economy through the fragile recovery and, as the economy grows, so will Ontario."

"People were telling me the economy was heading in the right direction, business was up, but it is fragile. They are worried that we may backslide, but by and large they are happy with the direction the economy is going and that is what I have heard from across the province. We have to be so careful we don't slash spending in the wrong places and send us in a back slide. You can't cut your way to growth. That is not how companies grow and that is not how governments grow the economy."

Another facet of the campaign Mr. Ballard said he found interesting was the number of younger voters in the community who were students during Mike Harris' "Common Sense Revolution" and "remember the strikes, remember the lack of books in their classrooms, and they don't want to return to that. It made a big impact on them and now they are remembering it. As a parent, I certainly remember that and I don't want to go back to these days either."

Looking ahead, Mr. Ballard said concerns over Liberal scandals related to ORNGE and the cancellation of the gas plants are "legitimate concerns" and ones he said he was not going to "duck". He is taking his lead, he says, from Kathleen Wynne, who as "acknowledged mistakes were made."

These concerns are going to be prominent during the campaign of Ms. Twinney who says people are angry about the direction the Liberal Government was going in and last week's budget was an indication they remained on the same trajectory.

"I think, honestly [the budget] was ridiculous," She says. "It was tons of spending, increased taxes and getting us further in debt. I was shocked at what it was, actually. There was just so much spending putting us further in debt and increasing taxes overall. The whole thing just doesn't make much sense."

"We're going down a road and digging a deeper hole that we're never going to get out of, and that is what I am hearing at the doors as well. I have been knocking on so many doors and people say we just can't go down this road anymore. We can't support this government anymore."

Ahead of the budget, Ms. Twinney says she was looking in particular for all-day two-way GO service, which was absent from the budget, yet something she says "everyone in this community" wants.

"We are showing a path that is going to get Ontario out of debt, that is going to get us on the right track and get Ontario back on track to move forward as a province of prosperity, where Ontarians want to be. We have to start somewhere and this has gone on too long. The government is getting us deeper and deeper into a hole and I don't see us getting out of it."

"I have a nine-year-old son and, gosh, he is only nine years before he will be in university and then, in a short period of time, he will be looking for a job and there is not going to be anything out there for him. It is not going to be a great place to be if we continue going down the road we have been going down in the past."

Keys in going forward, she adds, is providing better support for GO Trains and transit, providing more opportunities for high quality jobs in the community, and leveraging the presence of Southlake Regional Health Centre in the riding of Newmarket-Aurora to attract business.