

Candidates share vision for post-COVID recovery

When Canadians head to the polls on September 20, they will not only be picking their next government, but the individuals as well who will play integral parts in the nation's post-COVID recovery.

This week, The Auroran asked confirmed candidates why a vote for them and the party they represent is a vote towards Canada's recovery in the years ahead.

NEWMARKET-AURORA

The NDP has "always been a party for the people, working class/middle class and those who have been sidelined by poverty and other life hardships," says party candidate Yvonne Kelly; and an economy that doesn't work for everyone is "not acceptable to us."

"That is why we are committed to tax reform that will allow us to expand public services and re-invest in ordinary Canadians who have been hit the hardest throughout this pandemic," she says. "In order to do that, we will implement comprehensive tax reform to increase our revenue streams and that can be done in a number of ways. We will return the corporate tax rate to their 2020 levels, or 18 per cent, while maintaining the small business tax credit at its current level.

"We will implement a 1 per cent tax on the wealthiest Canadians (those in excess of \$10 million in wealth), close tax loopholes, tackle tax havens, rein in real estate speculation, and make big polluters pay. The Canadians for Tax Fairness Platform for Tax Fairness has estimated that such a comprehensive approach could generate \$90 billion in revenues annually.

"The other reason that the NDP is the right party to lead the recovery is because we are the people we represent and we understand the struggles of everyday Canadians. It is important that we build back for a just recovery that addresses the disparities that have been revealed as a result of COVID. Women and racialized women have been disproportionately impacted and yet they most often have been the workers on the frontline, in the service industry, in health care settings and in non-for-profit organizations, who didn't take time off and couldn't work from home during the pandemic. Our very survival was on their backs.

"Having gone through a crisis of such magnitude and understanding where many of the cracks are, we need to learn from this experience and build for the future. We can't return to the status quo, or continue to leave people behind, and we can't wait any longer to take ambitious action on climate change."

Conservative candidate Harold Kim says his party has a plan for every program and service "that has gone off the rails in the past six years."

Their recovery plan, he says, will "unleash innovation and move Canada up in the 2020 Global Index from its current standing at 17th in the world for research and development and 21st for technology output."

"We will be investing \$5 billion over five years for research and development of hydrogen, electric vehicles and pharmaceutical research and production in Canada in addition to providing tax incentives for buying from a Canadian start-up, financing incentives, to name just a few," he says. "We have the talent and the natural resources that Canada should be on the world's radar. We are providing many programs to support the economy. Small businesses are the mainstay of Canada's economy and have been hit hard by the pandemic. We have included a Rebuild Main Street program that includes providing tax credits, loans and tax credits for capital investments and will be reforming the Business Development Bank of Canada to make it easier to start a business. We are also focussing on the supply side of the economy with our Job Surge Plan. In this plan we will be giving a helping hand to those whose ability to work was affected by the pandemic. But the help isn't just throwing more money at them and leaving them to fend for themselves without help for the future. Conservatives believe Canadians should have choices about their futures and have provided many options to help Canadians upgrade their skills, start a new career, take additional training or undergo apprenticeship programs to get Canadians back working again in good jobs.

As part of the recovery, we need to ensure this state of unpreparedness [at the start of the pandemic] never happens again. We need to amend our Emergency Preparedness plans, build stockpiles of emergency supplies, including making vaccines domestically and ensure a more responsive relationship with the Provincial Premiers.

For incumbent Liberal candidate Tony Van Bynen, integral in the recovery will be building a country where we're tackling the big issues and making sure that nobody gets left behind.

I genuinely believe that the Liberal Party has the record and the plan to keep making Canada the very best place in the world to live, he says. On everything from childcare to housing to climate change, I think we'll be able to keep making a lot of progress on making peoples' lives better once we finish the fight against the pandemic.

Recovery, he adds, obviously has an economic component but having vaccine mandates in place will be vital in getting us back to our normal lives.

The lack of social interaction and the impact it has on our relationships and our mental health has been a huge challenge for everyone, he says. If we're able to get back to travelling, to more regularly seeing our friends and family, and to safely going to restaurants, concerts, and sporting events I think that's going to be the most mentally beneficial part of the recovery for all of us. Vaccines are our path back to being able to do all of that.

AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Liberal candidate Leah Taylor Roy says her party has had Canada's backs and going forward Canadians need a government that will support us.

We fought for businesses and protected millions of jobs, she says. We quickly introduced the Emergency Response benefit to ensure Canadians who did lose their jobs didn't have to worry about paying rent or putting food on the table. We secured one of the most diverse vaccine portfolios in the world and rolled them out ahead of schedule. Canada has weathered this storm better than almost anywhere in the world, and it's the Liberal government's leadership that got us there.

Erin O'Toole's Conservatives want to wind down relief spending when many families, businesses and industries still need it to stay afloat. We can't afford to move backward and dial down our efforts now. We need to ramp them up to finish this fight and ensure our recovery is strong and sustainable. The Liberals are the only party with the plan and the record to get us to that finish line. Canada has weathered this storm better than almost anywhere else in the world and I am proud of the way most Canadians have come together in communities and helped one another.

We must continue to pull together to collaborate and respect one another. During this election campaign, I have seen an ugliness that we must work to eradicate. Together we can reduce the anxiety that Canadians are feeling by continuing to focus on vaccinations to end the pandemic. Then, we can continue to work together and move forward for everyone.

Conservative incumbent candidate Leona Alleslev, however, says Canada is at a tipping point with economic, social and diplomatic challenges that require urgent national attention.

The pandemic has laid bare many of the cracks that previously existed within Canada's economic and social structures, she says. From the quality of jobs, to health care standards and access, housing availability and climate change, to the effectiveness of tax programs and consumer protection, many of Canada's national systems are severely out of balance and in need of fundamental restructuring. Canada must reprioritize national self-sufficiency by investing in domestic capabilities in health, food, energy, and infrastructure. At the same time Canada must also reprioritize international relationships to regain global respect and increase trade with allies and like-minded partners to mitigate our dependence upon nations whose values are in direct conflict with our own.

Canada's Conservatives have a detailed plan with sound solutions to address all of these critical elements. But more than just a plan, we have a leader and a team that know how to get things done. As a logistics officer in the military, I made sure that our men and women in uniform had what they needed, where and when they needed it, to serve our country. As a senior program manager at IBM and Bombardier Aerospace, I implemented projects that supported critical operations and manufactured airplanes. My Conservative colleagues and I will deliver on Canada's Recovery plan so that together we will secure Canada's future.

NDP candidate Janice Hagan, on the other hand, says the NDP doesn't believe in "trickle down" economics and recovery starts where action is most needed, such as shaving \$20,000 off of student loans and stopping interest on their remaining debt.

We will invest in housing, green infrastructure and public transit, to create sustainable jobs and improve access to internet and public transit in rural communities," she says. We will continue the \$2,000 minimum for Employment Insurance, improve EI for the self-employed and increase retraining for new technologies. Small Businesses will also directly benefit from wage and rent subsidies, hiring bonuses and caps on credit card fees.

We need to learn from COVID, who was most vulnerable, and ensure that changes are made to protect everyone. Our seniors living alone and in long term care facilities faced inhumane conditions. Never again. There is no room for profit in long term care. We need a public system with appropriate staffing numbers and standards based on best practices for mental and physical vitality. We also watched the women's movement leap backwards 50 years as more women were forced from their jobs. The NDP will build a reliable and safe child care system that families can afford at \$10/day, expanding the successful Quebec program that has had incredible results. We also need to ensure that there is access to broadband internet and cell phone coverage throughout the country, including in remote areas, and rural pockets even in York Region where internet is spotty.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter