

Jobs and economy brought to forefront in Newmarket-Aurora debate

By Brock Weir

Depending on which candidate you ask, you could get a very different picture painted on the current health of the Canadian economy.

While all candidates vying for your vote in Newmarket-Aurora agree more jobs are needed down the line, the path to get there is very different.

In the often raucous debate held last week by the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce, moderator Bill Hogg put the three participating candidates — Lois Brown for the Conservatives, Yvonne Kelly for the NDP, and Kyle Peterson for the Liberals — in the hot seat, looking for specifics on just how a vote for them would bring job growth to the area.

For Ms. Kelly, key in the NDP job plan was to think local. Small businesses, she said, “drive the engine” of the economy and an NDP government will put measures in place to help these businesses provide good jobs. The way to do this, she said, is to reduce small business taxes, investing in local economies rather than cutting taxes based on promises from large corporations that they intend to invest back into their country and their community.

“We know often that doesn't happen,” said Ms. Kelly. “Our platform is very much to invest in innovation in small businesses and I think we can have an impact. We have to choose where we have that impact. I think we also need to stand up for things we believe are important, which is full-time, good-paying jobs with benefits, the kinds of jobs that people need to be able to live.”

Looking back over the achievements of the Conservative government, Ms. Brown said her party's tax plans have created 1.3 million new jobs since the end of the recession. Citing statistics from the York Region Business Survey, she said business in the riding has grown by over 21 per cent over the last four years.

This was a stat questioned by Mr. Peterson who said these jobs are “precarious and low-paying.” People in the riding, he said, were finding it harder to make ends meet. Ms. Brown, on the other hand, countered that 90 per cent of the jobs she cited were full-time jobs.

“I visited a business in July that is creating 100 new jobs that are high tech jobs in our community, not two kilometres from where we sit,” she said. “Those are the kinds of jobs that people want to see: high skill, innovation kinds of jobs.”

For Mr. Peterson, to create the kind of jobs people in Newmarket-Aurora need, an investment needs to be made to foster an environment which creates jobs.

“You don't create jobs by not investing in our country, in Canadians, and our neighbours,” he said. “You create jobs by investing. Investing in infrastructure is a fantastic way to create jobs.”

This transitioned into a heated discussion on the merits of balanced budgets, something highly touted by the Conservative campaign, versus running some deficits in order to invest in key areas, such as infrastructure, a key Liberal platform plank.

“Every economist agrees that the time to invest is when interest rates are low,” said Mr. Peterson. “Even Ms. Brown's party had infrastructure investments in the 2007 – 2008 recession. That's how you do it and that is great economic policy. I think this economy is sluggish, it's slow, it is not pumping out the jobs it needs to pump out. It is not giving children what they need. The best way to do that is to give this economy a little jump start to invest in people, invest in Canadians, invest in growth. The way to do that is to run small deficits for the next three years, back to balanced budgets in 2018 – 2019.”

In response, Ms. Brown rejected the idea offered by Mr. Peterson that the Liberal government under Paul Martin left a surplus when

the Conservative government came in by saying the Liberals balanced the budget by taking \$25 billion out of healthcare.

?When we took office in 2006, the first thing we did was pay \$38 billion off our national debt,? she said. ?That left us in a place where when we went into recession it left some room to wiggle. We agreed with all the G8 Countries that we were going to go into stimulus funding. It was a global recession beyond our control? but we always said our goal was to be back to balanced budgets by 2015-2016.?

On the opposite side of the table, Ms. Kelly characterised the Conservative party's balanced budget as a ?little bit of a smoke screen? and that governments occasionally have to go into a deficit position ? but that is not the position of an NDP government should one be elected next week.

?At this point in time, the NDP have said we are going to balance our budget because we're going to balance income and revenue with costs, expenses and investments across the country,? said Ms. Kelly. ?We are going to do that not just by raising corporate taxes ? and hopefully they don't pass it onto their shareholders ? but also by closing corporate loopholes. Can anyone in this room actually get excited about the fact people who make 200 times more money than you have access to corporate tax loopholes when you pay your fair share of taxes??