

NDP candidate wants to "speak truth to power"



By Brock Weir

Some people change their name to something more suited to their personality or tailored to their life goals, but the name Brenda Power suits the NDP candidate for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill just fine.

"I speak truth to power," she says. "I have never gotten the big promotions because if I see things that aren't being done the way they should be, I have criticized, often to my detriment, but that is who I am."

Ms. Power is seeking to take this voice to Ottawa as a representative of the riding, carved out of the southern half of Aurora and northern tier of Richmond Hill.

As a first time candidate, Ms. Power, a resident of North York, is still getting a lay of the land, meeting with local supporters, and working to rebuild the strength of the riding association after the riding reshuffle.

"I am proud of myself for having the courage to do this, despite the fact I am actually a shy person, but I will continue to do what I think I need to do despite the difficulties, and I have done that many times."

Ms. Power says she has been doing what needed to be done from a very young age. Born in Ontario, her family moved back to Newfoundland when she was aged just three. It was a small community and her playmates were limited to her younger siblings and cousins. With her mother battling what she describes as a "very serious mental illness", she increasingly found herself taking on a sense of responsibility caring for others.

This was heightened when she became a young, single mother who, in those difficult years, had to take advantage of the social services and programs being offered, giving her a unique perspective on the challenges faced by many people in this community.

"I think most of us, the kind of lives we have had growing up and as young adults shape our perspectives," says Ms. Power. "But it wasn't just the kind of life I had; it was in my nature. In many cases, when people are thinking about who to vote for, they think in terms of how it affects them personally. "What am I getting out of this? What are you going to do for me? Are you going to reduce my taxes?" That's not the way I think.

"I have a relatively good job [with the Provincial government]. I don't own my own home ? I'd like to, but I can't ? but compared to a

lot of people in this country, I have a pretty good job with benefits. I am far from having enough money in my daughter's RESP, but I don't think of how that is going to impact me personally because as long as there are people who are homeless, I am effected personally. As long as there are parents and single parents out there who are living on welfare, and whose kids are going to school hungry, that affects me personally. As long as we continue to destroy the environment, that affects me personally on a moral and ethical level.?

The New Democrats come closest to representing this viewpoint, she says. It is 'far from perfect?', but it is the best fit for her.

Ms. Power says she has always had an interest in politics, but a series of events converged to convince her this was the right time to put her name forward. She was particularly motivated by the convention of the Canadian Labour Congress held this past November. She soon unsuccessfully sought the NDP's nomination in her home riding but soon they asked if she would consider taking on this fledgling riding.

'I think the most important issues in this riding aren't overly different than in some of the other ridings, especially the smaller cities that are close to Toronto,' says Ms. Power.

Public and affordable housing are top priorities, as is support for transportation and public transit. Funding for municipal infrastructure needs to be stable, guaranteed, and long-term.

'One of the big things I am really interested in is green technologies and there are a lot of companies who are actually working in the green technology field. They think incentives to the auto sector should be tied to the auto sector developing more energy efficient, environmentally friendly cars, for example. If you combine that with expanding the public transportation system, it will help a lot.'

But, there is still a lot of work to be done. Until very recently, Ms. Power says this campaign had basically been a one-woman show, but now that the resources and expertise are coming into place, one of the biggest challenges will be urging residents of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill to think a bit differently this time around in how they cast their votes.

'If someone asks me if an issue is going to affect them personally, they first have to tell me what it is they want affected,' she says. 'Someone asked me about income splitting because there is a misconception that it is going to affect seniors where, in fact, it isn't. If I knock on someone's door and it is a family that is benefitting from income splitting and they are a couple in their 30s or 40s, a typical scenario is one where one of them is working and bringing home over \$100,000 a year.'

'Is the NDP cutting this? Yes, it is. It is benefiting so few people that it is not a fair tax benefit and we need to make fairer tax programs. I would ask people in the most respectful way possible ' because I would use myself as an example ' to consider in this election to think about when you vote not only voting on what benefits you personally, but what is good for the majority of the country. If everybody is helped, it will actually help you. If everyone is helped, it builds a strong economy and you too will benefit from that.'