

Newmarket-Aurora ?is a Liberal seat and should be a Liberal seat,? argues Health Minister



By Brock Weir

Premier Kathleen Wynne may have called the June 12 Provincial election on Friday afternoon, but the campaign got off to an early start last week with a fundraising visit from Health Minister Deb Matthews.

Matthews was on hand at Highland Gate Golf Club on Wednesday evening to support the fundraiser of Councillor Chris Ballard, who was acclaimed the Liberal Party of Ontario's candidate for Newmarket-Aurora in March.

Speaking to a crowd of about 40 supporters, Matthews told the crowd that in Newmarket-Aurora she saw ?an opportunity to win a seat that is a Liberal seat, should be a Liberal seat? and said Ballard had a ?demonstrated track record? in the community.

?He is an idealistic person who gets things done,? she said. ?He brings that commitment to everything that he does and we need him at Queen's Park. There is enough partisanship down there, and what I call the WWF [of politics]. It is time we really focused on the things that are important to families and Chris will do exactly that.?

While the event was originally scheduled to be a fundraising for Ballard's campaign, focus was also firmly set on the Ontario Budget, which was to be delivered the following afternoon. For Matthews, it was an exciting time and an opportunity for a party to really put its money where its mouth is.

?Even though people say budgets are dry, boring and not important, they are so not that,? she said. ?Budgets are an expression of your values. This is where you say, ?this is what is important to me and this is what I am actually going to be putting money behind.??

Of particular interest to her, she said was an announcement of bringing the base pay for Personal Support Workers up to \$16.50 from \$12.50 over the next two years, as well as an \$810 million ?game changer? in funds for persons with developmental disabilities.

?We are committed to getting to balance,? she said. ?We don't like having a deficit more than anybody else, but we're not going to reach balance at the expense of our most vulnerable and that is what others are suggesting we do. We will hear on the campaign with Tim Hudak and others of his candidates that we can't afford the changes that we are making. I totally reject the idea that we can't afford to pay personal support workers a decent income. I reject that.

?We can't provide care in the community without personal support workers if we don't have enough personal support workers. Nobody can convince me that we can't support people with developmental disabilities. We must do that and we are going to do that. We will get to balance but we do not have the attitude we can't do anything else. We will invest in people.?

The Liberals, she said, would also support infrastructure, touting high speed rail. On the other hand, the New Democrats ?want everything but they don't want to pay for anything?, Matthews claimed, adding it was something which left her ?disappointed? with a party she once ?knew and respected.?

?I don't even care whether they vote for the budget or not,? said Matthews of the NDP. ?I would like them to vote for the budget. I would like to be able to carry on and implement what we are talking about, but if they force us into an election I am so ready to fight. I am so proud of Kathleen. I am so proud of the candidates like Chris that are running across this province. Kathleen has attracted wonderful candidates and we are going to have a fantastic campaign.

?It matters who is in power. If you care about the education our kids are getting, if you care about the health care we all need at some point in our life, if you care about building a strong, prosperous province, if you care about investing in the people of this province, then we need to be back there. We need to be able to continue to implement the kind of change I think the people of this province want.?

Ballard also shared his support for his party leader, stating he admired ?the openness and transparency? she has brought to the Premier's Office.

?As someone who is involved in government, albeit at the local level, it is very important and I so appreciate her take and what she has brought to the table. She defines what leadership is to all of us and brings a new tone to elected office.

?I believe we are bringing leadership with heart to Newmarket-Aurora.?