

Remaining candidates looking forward to Vote Smart debates



The candidates are pictured with Vote Smart organizer Kelsea Walsh on Friday morning. Auroran photo by Brock Weir

By Brock Weir

Despite the non-participation of Aurora's two Conservative candidates, the remaining candidates vying for your vote say they are looking forward to two engaging evenings at the Aurora Cultural Centre next week.

For many of the candidates, the informal nature of the meetings, established by local university student Kelsea Walsh, is an innovative way to engage area residents, one they hope will make politics more attractive to younger voters.

"I wanted to encourage what Kelsea was doing because it is rare you get someone who is not involved in a Chamber of Commerce or who is not involved in a more traditional media outlet or community organization who says they want to do this," said Leona Alleslev, Liberal candidate for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. "It is about how we have the conversations. We have come to a point where we're not allowed to talk about sex, religion and politics, but I think we need to change that. We need to have the courage to talk about politics because it is our country, it is our future, and it affects all of us."

It is a fallacy to believe that 25-35 year old voters are somehow different from the larger electorate, she said, or that they are incapable of understanding the big issues and that does them a disservice. This is a view shared by Newmarket-Aurora NDP candidate Yvonne Kelly but, she said, it is important to note that younger voters, in turn, are looking for something a little bit different from their politicians.

"I think in this age group really want to see politicians that are willing to work together and not use the platform to talk about what is wrong with everybody else's policy as much as what they are going to do," said Ms. Kelly. "I think if you've got a group of millennials that have had a bit of a glimpse into what politics looks like in the last 10 years, they are really dissatisfied with that, so I like this format. We're not in an open debate, we're actually presenting ideas, and we're actually giving people a choice to look at what we actually stand for. I think people like that."

Newmarket-Aurora Green Party candidate Vanessa Long said she had no hesitation in responding to Ms. Walsh's invitation to participate because it is a fresh change from the standard all-candidates' debate.

"As much as our society and our culture seems to turn towards reality TV and drama and shock, I think the under-30 voters especially are too smart and too wise to get fooled by that," said Ms. Long. "They want to hear what we stand for, what our issues are and, more than that, they want to feel we are genuine, that we're really showing up, we actually care about what they're saying and we're not totally BS-ing them."

Engaging younger voters is especially important to Newmarket-Aurora Liberal candidate Kyle Peterson. Mr. Peterson first got involved in politics early on in university and, after that, there was no turning back.

"I just thought [Vote Smart] was a brilliant idea," said Mr. Peterson. "We need to do whatever we can to get more people generally involved in voting in elections. We are the only party that is promoting real change for the middle class, real change for Canada, and investments in Canada's future, which I think resonates with all age groups across the country. I am most looking forward to engaging with voters. I love meeting people and being able to deliver what it is we want to do for Canada. Any voter engagement is a positive thing, for most people."

Engagement is the watchword for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill NDP candidate Brenda Power as she looks forward to the all-candidates meeting. It is an event not intended to promote one candidate over another, but just to interact and become involved.

"Anything that gets people engaged – young people, old people – is great and I am absolutely willing to participate in anything that would get people interested in what is going on in their country and get them to believe they have a voice, what they say matters, and to get them to believe that, yes, there could actually be real-life politicians that will actually listen to them.

"We can understand why they don't have faith. I understand the thinking of people who would support someone like Rob Ford, because they have been ignored or neglected. I get it. When that happens, we get someone like Ford or, in the States, Donald Trump. That is what happens when you continuously, year after year, ignore the people you are supposed to be representing. I find it appalling and that is why I am doing this."