

Students press Newmarket-Aurora candidates on climate change, taxes



**By
Brock Weir**

They came with questions that mattered to them, and Newmarket-Aurora's Federal candidates came to face students this month at a youth-led all-candidates debate hosted by Pickering College.

Attending the meeting prepared to answer the questions were, in alphabetical order, Walter Bauer of the Green Party, Lois Brown of the Conservative Party, Yvonne Kelly of the NDP, and Tony Van Bynen of the Liberal Party.

“Being critically informed about elections and political decision-making is an important part of being a global citizen,” said Grade 10 student Michaela Morra, welcoming the candidates.

Many of the topics raised during the 40 minute session looked at Federal issues from a global lens, with students and candidates alike linking many of the issues back to the climate crisis.

The first question out of the gate was what each candidate thought the “tax rate” should be for people of lower and higher incomes.

Ms. Brown was first to respond, stating the Conservatives have lowered taxes for “people who are in the most-needy brackets” including a reduction in the GST. Her party, she said, proposes eliminating the “carbon tax, because that is costing people, particularly in the lowest income brackets, the most amount of money.”

Continuing to answer this question by looping back to climate change and carbon pricing, Ms. Kelly said her party would not eliminate the “carbon tax” because “We do feel it is something that helps us offset the carbon.” Additional measures, she said, include raising the level of taxes on corporations, as well as closing tax loopholes that can lead to tax avoidance.

Mr. Van Bynen, after harkening back to the Liberal record, responded to Ms. Brown's claims during his time at the podium.

‘Don't be fooled by the idea of saying there is a carbon tax; it's not,’ he said. ‘It is a price on pollution. A lot of people seem to forget to tell you that money is refunded back to you and that refund offsets what most of the vulnerable families are spending.’

Mr. Bauer, in his response, said that the Green Party agrees with the NDP's position on taxes, paying particular attention to closing tax loopholes. They would also, he added, tax companies like Facebook, Netflix, and Uber who currently don't pay taxes.’

The next question got to the heart of the matter: ‘What do you think climate change in the world will look like in 10 years? What is your party doing to address this?’

Answering this question first was Ms. Kelly, who said scientists have said there are ‘eleven years to get this right.’

‘The NDP government is committed to doing everything we can to be able to reduce our carbon footprint,’ she said. ‘We actually emit higher than average across Canada per capita, so we actually even though we're a smaller country in terms of population, we actually have a huge carbon footprint on this world that we need to take responsibility for and we really believe in that.’

An NDP government, she added, would immediately ‘start to build a green economy’ which, she said, ‘will be an answer to a lot of the issues we have.’

The Liberal Party, claimed Mr. Van Bynen, the next speaker, has the only ‘credible climate plan to go forward that has the support of scientists across the world and economists.’

‘Transition to a green economy is not an overnight thing, so we have to make sure we go about this carefully,’ he said. ‘There are many people who are reliant on the fossil fuel industry and we have to make sure we don't become casualties. What we will be doing is reinvesting any surplus money that comes from the price on pollution to green technology and green jobs.’

In prediction of what climate change might look like in 10 years, Mr. Bauer cast a wider net to 2030.

‘By 2030, there's going to be a total loss of coral reefs, there's going to be more flooding, more drought, and an increase in migration because of climate change,’ he said. ‘We see this today

in our north; it's already at 4 degrees Celsius, far above what anyone expected.?

Last to answer the question was Ms. Brown who referred the student to the Conservative party website for environmental answers because, ?a tax plan is a tax plan,? before closing by telling students about her Ghana-born son-in-law, who earned two masters and a PhD in Canada, taking ?the very best of Canadian know-how, experience and technology back to Ghana? to build solar projects.