

Voters want change, candidates agree



By Brock Weir

Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne "stunned" political observers on Saturday making an early concession speech that changed the conversation in the last few days of the 2018 election campaign.

It brought the Liberal campaign back into the public consciousness, one which has been dominated by the neck and neck positions of the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats.

Here in Aurora, however, despite the announcement being met with surprise by voters and candidates alike, all candidates are sticking to their game plans to get out the all-important vote.

Many of the candidates of all stripes were doing just that at the Aurora Chamber Street Festival with representation from Liberal candidates Chris Ballard (Newmarket-Aurora) and Naheed Yaqubian (Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill) at the northernmost part of the Yonge Street route along with, moving south, Denis Van Decker (Newmarket-Aurora) of the None of the Above party, Newmarket-Aurora NDP candidate Melissa Williams, Trillium Party leader Bob Yaciuk, and Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill PC candidate Michael Parsa.

Newmarket-Aurora PC candidate Christine Elliott was represented by a host of volunteers but was not present for the event itself. By the end of the Street Festival, there were only three full days of campaigning left, leaving the Liberal candidates a bit of time to recalibrate before this week's vote after Ms. Wynne said there was no hope of her party forming government while, at the same time, urging voters to back her Liberal candidates to ensure a minority NDP or PC government this Thursday.

"We're feeling good, our numbers are strong, our volunteers are really energized," said Ms. Yaqubian. "This has been one of the most interesting elections I have seen in my lifetime. There have been lots of twists and turns."

Ms. Yaqubian reiterated many of the concerns outlined by Ms. Wynne the previous day, staying on message that a PC majority led by Doug Ford would be "disastrous" for the Province.

"Most voters in Ontario have come to the conclusion they do not want Mr. Doug Ford in government and, as a strong local advocate, I know we can win this and I will do everything in my power to make sure we hold him to account because a Doug Ford majority with unfettered power would be disastrous for the Province of Ontario."

While Ms. Yaqubian declined to comment on what impact Ms. Wynne's announcement might have on the local races, she said, "We, as Liberals, all support her and we were obviously sad there was no path for victory for us to continue to serve in government."

"But I think in the Liberal party it is time for renewal, it is time for a new generation of voices to come forward, and I hope to be one of those voices," she said.

Mr. Ballard, however, said Saturday's events were "typical Kathleen Wynne."

"She was concerned about her colleagues, she was concerned about the party and frankly she had heard from enough people that she was an impediment to us getting elected as MPPs, so she stepped away," he said. "That's Kathleen Wynne. She is putting her party, putting her colleagues before her own personal goals, so I was quite proud she would do that and quite sorry, too, because I don't

think she has been deserving of the vitriol that has been hurled at her.

?I think in my riding I had some people say they were worried that the vote would move from Liberal to NDP and it is such a tight race that even a few hundred votes could shift that vote. If I had a concern it is her announcement that people believe they should be voting NDP to stop Doug Ford, in Newmarket-Aurora that is not going to happen. A vote for the NDP really is a vote for Doug Ford because it could take just enough votes away from me for Christine Elliott to come up the middle and give Doug Ford another seat.? Driving that message home, he said was his biggest challenge in the last days of the campaign ? all the while continuing to door-knock.

Elsewhere, candidates from the poll-leading PCs and NDPs remain focused on their messages and getting out the vote.

?[The Saturday announcement] is really sad for her, of course, but it is an attempt to try and sway voters the other way and a lot of people see through that,? said Ms. Williams of the Premier. ?People are ready for change. I don't think that is going to make a huge impact. I think, if anything, it is going to sway people toward the NDP, which is what people need to be doing. Change.

?We're in it to win it. It has been a very exciting time with announcements that have been made yesterday, so I see us out in front and I am really excited to get to Thursday and we'll know then. The voters are very optimistic right now, they are looking for that change and that is what I am seeing and that's what I'm hearing. That keeps up everybody's optimism, encouragement and excitement.?

Mr. Parsa had the same view that this election is about change and, in his view, he's the candidate to bring that about in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

?Just going down to the wire, we're going to do everything we can and reach out to as many people as we can,? said Mr. Parsa. ?This is a great opportunity for us to be able to talk to people who are receptive. It's good, it's good times. I am keeping my focus here on the ground just talking to people. I am not paying too much to what is happening other than in this riding here. I don't know if the momentum has changed; people have wanted change right from the beginning. They said that. Now they are deciding where they are going to park their vote and I believe our party is the only viable option going forward for prosperity and I think people will see that on June 7 and people will support us.?

Mr. Yaciuk, on the other hand, was bold enough to predict a PC majority this Thursday, but said he still hopes people will consider a vote for the Trillium Party.

?I am trying to figure out Kathleen Wynne's capitulation. That was a stunner,? he said. ?I have never seen that happen. She just quit. It is going to be one of the strangest elections that have ever occurred. I hope people will support the Trillium Party of Ontario just to add a little bit of conscience in there. They are going to win anyways, so why don't you support the Trillium Party just to make sure they know that you are waking up and know there are options available??