

Candidates square off in Orangeville

By Tabitha Wells

It was a full house at last Wednesday night's debate for the upcoming election.

Held at Orangeville District Secondary School, the session was hosted by the Greater Dufferin Area Chamber of Commerce and the newly formed Dufferin Board of Trade.

The call for a new voice to represent the riding was loud and clear from the opposing candidates, while Conservative incumbent David Tilson spoke to the need to remain the same, calling for responsible leadership to rebuild Canada's falling economy ? a job that he thinks can only be done by not pursuing change.

?Now is not the time for change and frisky economic approaches led by those without experience,? Tilson said. ?Here in Dufferin-Caledon and across the country, Canadians want to feel safe. Only our party can provide that security and tackle threats like the jihadists head on. The alternatives lack the necessary experience and have an unwillingness to take action. We need leadership and experience, and this is what our government possesses.?

Despite Tilson's confidence in towing his party line and standing firm with Harper's goals, those present at the debate were not as impressed. Tilson's comments caused several outbursts from the crowd, calling into question his support of anti-terrorism Bill C-51 (which has come under fire by organizations such as Amnesty International for crossing the line on human rights), and for the muzzling of scientists, which was revealed earlier this year. Moderator Ron Munro had to request several times that the audience allow Tilson to finish his comments.

The Conservatives also received several jabs from the opposing candidates, particularly when it came to a question regarding research into improving agriculture to help the increasing need for food worldwide.

?The first thing we would do would be to unmuzzle the scientists,? said NDP candidate Rehya Yazbek. ?The NDP plan on implementing a national strategy to increase access to local, organic foods. One of the upcoming cuts from the Conservatives is to take \$1.4 billion from food safety, cutting 700 food inspectors. We are going to increase incomes and support so that every family can afford a healthy meal. And we won't cut the food inspectors.?

Green Party representative Nancy Urekar seconded the need to unmuzzle the scientists and move on.

?It's not right what's been done and Canadians want to see this happen,? she said.

She went on to explain that focusing on increasing and improving agriculture would be key in helping provide the world with more access to food.

?We have to re-instate the positions that have been lost in agricultural Canada,? Urekar said. ?The government has devastated a lot of the scientists and people that worked for Agriculture Canada. We need to negotiate agreements with the Provinces to protect farmland and provide sufficient fiscal incentives. We need sustainable food and lots of local food.?

The candidates were also asked how their parties intend to implement a national action plan on violence against women, and focus on the restoration and expanding of capital supports to shelters.

?As part of our infrastructure program, we will spend a third of it on social and affordable housing, which provides support for those women who are in dangerous situations,? said Liberal Ed Crewson. ?Having served 23 years on the Shelburne Police Services Board, I saw the cost of violence in the home. I would also support immediate the investigation of the 1,200 women who have been missing, and are presumed dead and gone.?

Urekar made it clear that women's rights are a definite part of Green Party policy, calling for the need for change.

?I don't get why we don't seem to understand that violence against women is not acceptable,? she said. ?The Green Party would defend every hard earned victory for women's rights. So many of these have been lost under the Conservative government. A lot of people fought for it, a lot of people have suffered for it, and we need to see a change. It's about equality and this is a society where we consider everybody equal. There is no second class.?

Tilson thought, however, that the Conservative support for the issue, particularly with the missing aboriginal issues, is going down the right path.

?We want to do whatever we can,? Tilson said. ?We support institutions in this community, like Family Transition Place, and the issue of the missing murdered women has been raised over and over again. These deaths and abductions are a tragedy, and have caused deep pain for their families. The only real solution is to look at this under the law. This is a criminal issue, and we are the only party in the house that has demonstrated any commitment to putting an end to the violence.?

While there was no clear winner of last Wednesday's debate, there was a large amount of applause and support for each of the candidates on different issues. In closing, the candidates spoke to their role as the Dufferin-Caledon MP, should they be elected, and

shared some of their goals.

"Ladies and gentleman, this is the most important election in this generation," Crewson said. "There is a clear choice between the voice of Harper in Dufferin-Caledon, and one who is ready to bring local, vocal and vigorous representation to the community. We have a vision of working together to roll out the biggest infrastructure investment in Canada."

He added that investment includes the support of small businesses, encouraging innovation and research by freeing scientists and unmuzzling researchers, and restoring a robust environmental process.

"It's time for real change in Dufferin-Caledon and it's time for real change in Ottawa," Crewson added. "I may not have nice hair? I wish I did? but I am ready to be your representative in parliament because I have spent my life caring for you. Your values are my values."

Yazbek took the opportunity to re-highlight more of NDP Leader Tom Mulcair's promises and platforms for a future Canada, speaking of issues such as climate change, childcare, liveable wages and a pursuit of change for a better country.

"For the first time, your government will set real targets and time tables for reducing emissions," Yazbeck said. "Instead of Harper's road blocks, we will work with the global community on global warming. If you are ready for change, think seriously about the NDP."

For the Green Party, Urekar explained that they have no delusions about becoming the reigning party in Canada at this point, but thinks the party has the opportunity to create positive change in the government if they can obtain more seats.

"We don't expect the Green Party to fly the government just yet, but this year there will be several Greens in parliament," Urekar said. "I'm running for the Green Party because I really care about the future of our county, Canada and earth. I care about the generations to come, and my children's children's children."

She added that the environment is the most serious issue Canada is facing today as it affects everything, from the economy to jobs, security and more.

"(The Green Party) influences the government," Urekar said. "We see our policies getting adopted, and we are happy to be there to make a difference. (We) have a plan. I'm not a career politician. I'm well known for honesty and integrity in this community. Vote for what really matters and vote for someone to hold them accountable. And if you want new ideas, you want change, don't go back to the old parties."

In his closing speech, Tilson reiterated that he believes now is not the time for change in Ottawa, but rather a time to keep the government the same to provide stability for the country.

"On October 19, you have a choice between strong, proven leadership and dangerous economic approaches," Tilson said. "We can all agree the global economy remains unstable and uncertain. A re-elected Conservative government will keep the economy strong and our country safe."

He added the Conservative party is one that supports small business and knows the backbone of the economy.

"The federal tax burden on Canadian families and on job creating businesses is the lowest it has been in several years," Tilson said.

"We are focused on protecting Canadian jobs, further lowering the small business tax rate, and further cutting red tape. These are just a few of the examples of how our government will help small business thrive and prosper. I am asking for your support, and continued support as your voice in Ottawa."