

Sparks fly at all-candidates? meeting in Bolton



Sparks flew to an extent last Thursday as issues were discussed at the all-candidates' meeting, held by the Caledon Chamber of Commerce at James Bolton Public School. Liberal Bobbie Daid, Progressive Conservative Sylvia Jones, Karren Wallace of the Green Party and New Democrat Rehya Yazbek were ready to go. Photo by Bill Rea

By Bill Rea

The crowd meant business last Thursday night, and so did the candidates as the Caledon Chamber of Commerce hosted an all-candidates' meeting at James Bolton Public School.

Four of the five candidates seeking to represent Dufferin-Caledon at Queen's Park were on hand, and there were several sharp barbs exchanged.

There were also several occasions when candidates were put on the defensive.

Liberal Bobbie Daid faced shots over her youthful appearance and inexperience.

"I'm a lot older than I look," she commented in her opening remarks.

For her part, she lashed out at the Progressive Conservatives' plan to cut 100,000 jobs from the public service, while stressing the need to extend GO Transit and Highway 427.

New Democrat Rehya Yazbek lashed out at Tory Sylvia Jones, accusing her party of selling assets for peanuts and not listening to Bolton residents over the massive Canadian Tire development proposal.

"We are the party that advocates for regular people," she declared.

Jones stressed her record at Queen's Park, adding she wants to help her party enhance jobs and opportunities to work close to where people live. She also said she brought in a private member's bill to increase the use of recycled aggregate, which had all-party support, but it was killed when the election was called.

Jones also lashed out at the scandals that have plagued the Liberal government, calling for leadership and transparency.

Green party candidate Karren Wallace recalled her work on the fight to keep the 2,300-acre quarry out of Melancthon Township, adding she has worked in government and understands how it operates.

"I'm passionate about being your next MPP," she said.

She also commented that education should be free of segregation based on sexual orientation or religion.

When it comes to strengthening business opportunities and job creation, Daid said it's important to work with small business to bring tax money into the economy.

Jones stressed she meets with all groups to learn and get ideas from them. She also pointed to her party's plan to create a million jobs.

Wallace focused on the Green plan to increase the employee health tax exemption for small business, commenting that will free up a lot of money. She also wondered how the Conservative plan to get rid of 100,000 positions will create jobs. She said it would impact on small business, since the people losing those jobs won't be spending money

Yazbek commented on the need to cut taxes to small business and reduce hydro rates. She said it's important to support small business, and not big-box retailers.

One woman in the audience commented on how the provincial debt has doubled under the Liberals, as well as scandals that have cost taxpayer dollars. "How can we trust any of you?" she asked.

Daid mentioned the gas plant scandal, agreeing it was a mistake that Premier Kathleen Wynne has apologized for. She added the Liberals were trying to create more accountability and transparency in their budget, which came down just before the election was

called.

'It's time to move forward,' she said.

'It was a lack of oversight,' Jones said, also pointing to the fact there are two OPP investigations being conducted on the government. She said that points to the need for a change in who leads the government.

Wallace countered that the opposition still have oversight on what the government's up to, adding the Liberals lost a lot of money with the opposition doing nothing.

'I can't afford a Liberal government,' she declared.

Daid said OPP investigations don't add up to guilt. She also referred to the scandals involving Ornge, pointing out the service still saves lives every day.

Wallace charged the Liberals did nothing to stop the Melancthon quarry, 'and neither did Sylvia Jones.'

Daid countered it was the Liberals who brought in the environmental assessment that did stop it.

On the subject of the 427 extension, Daid said the Dufferin-Caledon didn't have a voice at the table, and that's what she wants to provide.

Jones stressed the importance of the extension. 'Our manufactured goods need roads, not congestion to get to market,' she remarked.

The role of the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) came up. One Caledon woman said four citizen groups have appeals before the board, with Caledon council siding with the developers.

Daid commented on the need for all levels of government to work together.

'Everyone deserves the right to appeal,' Jones observed, adding the answer isn't to just get rid of OMB, as she pointed out the board backed the residents on the Rockfort quarry. Jones also said that before OMB, it was cabinet that dealt with appeals. 'I don't want them making rules,' she declared.

Wallace countered Jones supported the ministerial zoning order (MZO) that was issued for the Canadian Tire development which effectively took away people's right to appeal.

She also commented on the need to know who the people who sit on OMB are.

'It's disgusting what happened in Bolton with Canadian Tire,' Yazbek charged. 'The government shoved it through.'

Jones said the matter is going before OMB, but Wallace said it's the MZO, not the proposal.

Daid said the public was marginalized on Canadian Tire. 'That's not the way to do business,' she said.

Jones pointed out Peel Region endorsed the zoning of the site, adding studies show people spend money near where they work.

'I support council's decision,' she said.

Yazbek said this will be a warehouse, meaning most of the jobs there will be minimum wage, and most of the employees will be Brampton residents.

Daid complained the community didn't get a say on the matter.

'Are you going to have a referendum on every vote that's taken in the legislature?' Jones asked her.

Daid repeatedly stressed the need for the riding to have a Liberal voice at the table, but several of the candidates wondered if she would be able to provide it.

'You will get your marching orders from the Liberals and you will never veer from that script, just like Sylvia,' Wallace told Daid.

'I'm sorry, honey,' Yazbek told Daid. 'But your experience will make you a back-bencher.'

Addressing the Conservative plan to get rid of the 100,000 jobs, Jones said it will bring the provincial workforce down to 1.1 million, which is where it was in 2009. Doctors, nurses, police officers, etc. will be protected, she said, adding the cuts will involve middle management positions, like those at the Ontario Power Authority.

Wallace was puzzled at how a million jobs can be created if 100,000 positions are cut.

Yazbek divided 100,000 by the number of ridings, and said 934 people in Dufferin-Caledon would be out of work.

'That 100,000 jobs is cutting the belly out of our community,' Daid said.

Jones maintained it's doable and needs to be done in order to get the provincial debt under control.

'It's only going to go up,' she added. 'It's only going to increase if we don't get spending under control.'