

# Candidates put best foot forward

Politics aside, one issue – voter apathy – united the would-be politicians and more than 275 of their electors at a Wellington-Halton Hills all-candidates meeting on Friday at the Gellert Centre in Georgetown South.

“Do me a favour?” Green Party candidate Brent Bouteiller asked the crowd at the end of the meeting, urging them to talk to their friends, neighbours, family and co-workers. “Ask them to do the one thing we really need them to do – we need them to vote,” Bouteiller said.

Only three of the five candidates attended the debate sponsored by the Georgetown University Women’s Club – Conservative incumbent MP Michael Chong, Green Party candidate Brent Bouteiller and Liberal Party hopeful Barry Peters. The Christian Heritage Party candidate, Jeffrey Streuter, told organizers he would not attend any all-candidates meetings.

The NDP candidate, Guelph University Central Student Association Local Affairs Commissioner, Anastasia Zavarella, 24, did not attend due to a previous commitment, but sent a message in which she detailed her involvement with the food bank, a sexual assault group, and Guelph’s Queer Equality group.

Each candidate briefly introduced themselves and their Party, and then answered written questions from the crowd, which was polite with the only negative response – loud disbelieving groans and boos of protest – when Chong said Conservative government Economic Action Plan advertising did not use public funds.

Bouteiller said he is upset by partisan advertising which “should not happen.” Peters said the government “missed the opportunity to invest this money into things that can cre-

ate jobs,” and suggested Tory ridings got more than their share.

Asked what importance they place on the environment, in light of the poor economy, Bouteiller said he entered politics to ensure a clean, healthy livable environment for his children and grandchildren, made possible taxes away from incomes and onto pollution.

“We want to have more efficient buildings, more efficient transportation. We want to have more efficient agricultural systems and so on,” Bouteiller said, adding the Green Party would develop new technologies and clean energy systems.

Chong said once the global economic turmoil passes, the environment – the biggest challenge of his generation – would be back on track. He said the federal government invested a record amount of money in the Georgetown GO line, including tripling the tracks, a new bridge over the Credit River and a return of GO Train service to Acton.

“We need to get people out of their cars and into rapid transit systems, and the expansion of Go Transit is an important part of our environment capability,” Chong said, adding the government also began a clean air dialogue with the United States, and developed stricter standards for vehicle emissions.

Peters said he also wants to create a clean and healthy environment, and asked why the Conservative government has done nothing. “It’s great to hear Mr. Chong say how he loves the environment and supports climate change, but where is Stephen Harper? Where is the Conservative government?” Peters asked.

Asked what they would do if their party received a majority in the House of Commons, Peters said the Liberal Party



**CANDIDATES DEBATE: Wellington-Halton Hills federal election candidates Barry Peters (left) Brent Bouteiller and MP Michael Chong faced voters at an all-candidates meeting on Friday at the Gellert Centre in Georgetown. – Frances Niblock photo**

would invite everyone into what leader Michael Ignatieff calls “the party of the big red tent.”

“We want everyone to have a voice. Parliament should have a voice, MPs should have a voice, and the Liberal party would not be opposed to having those (compromise) dialogues...” Peters said, adding they would do the best for the most people, and not have one agenda, with one man at the top, making all the decisions.

Bouteiller cracked up the crowd up when he joked that a Green Party majority would be a “wonderful thing.” He said they would look at changing the way MPs are elected so they represent all of the people that vote.

“...When your vote goes

to somebody that didn’t get elected, a lot of people feel that it is wasted. It’s not, but wouldn’t it be better to elect some one who actually got into Parliament? Through proportional representation, that can be done,” Peters said, adding more than one-million people voted for the Green Party in the last federal election, yet they have no seats.

Chong said majority or minority, the Conservatives would carry out their economic programs to fight the deficit and create jobs. “We would continue to focus on trying to help Canadian families with the cost of raising families, We’d continue to focus on our law and order agenda, (and) continue to focus on the re-investments we’ve made, and will make, in our military

and our sovereignty,” Chong said.

In his closing comment, Peters said voters have a clear choice to make – the same old Harper government, or the Liberal way. “It’s time to change the channel and get off this course that we’re on because the Conservative Party will tell you ‘we need to stay on this course. We need to not change things now – it’s very fragile.’ Sounds like George Bush to me, and we all know what happened down there,” Peters said.

Chong said the election is important for two reasons, including all of the worldwide turmoil. “Now is not the time for change in economic plans. Our government’s economic plan has been unmatched in the world for economic re-

covery,” Chong said, adding to continue the recovery, he needs their votes and continued support.

Bouteiller concluded by appealing to everyone to urge others to vote, and to think about how their vision of Canada works with the vision presented by each candidate.

“You need to make a choice between an organization that has been in contempt of Parliament and an organization – the Green Party – that will provide you with a strong economy, a clean environment that will also give us healthy people...” he said.

The candidates also fielded questions about health care, the importance of the CBC, taxation reform and controlling the Canadian Border Services Agency.

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