

Candidates square off—nicely

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

Funding for Georgetown Hospital, agriculture and education were just some of the issues raised at the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce Meet the Candidates Business Breakfast Tuesday morning.

About 36 people came out for the event, hosted by Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce at Eagle Ridge Golf Course, to hear from Wellington-Halton Hills provincial candidates Ted Arnott (Progressive Conservative), Moya Johnson (Liberal) and Dale Hamilton (NDP). Green Party candidate Raymond Dartsch didn't respond to the Chamber's invitation to attend.

The candidates were very cordial to each other during the session that began with brief opening remarks before they took questions from the floor.

Town Councillor Jon Hurst asked Arnott about the funding announced for Georgetown Hospital and Groves Memorial Hospital in Fergus by the Liberal government, and asked if that funding would be guaranteed under a Conservative government.

Arnott said he had a letter from Minister of Health Deb Matthews dated Sept. 2 confirming her support for Georgetown Hospital to proceed with the ER and diagnostic imaging expansion project.

"I consider this to be a commitment of the Government of Ontario. If I were in the legislature after Oct. 6, I don't care who is in power, I would do everything I possibly could to ensure this commitment is honoured," said Arnott.

Johnson said the Liberal government has approved both of the projects.

"They will be built under a Liberal government," said Johnson. "I've yet to see though from Ted's leader (Tim Hudak) a commitment to those projects. That would certainly give me a sense of satisfaction to see Mr. Hudak produce a (similar) letter that would support Ted's position that those projects would proceed under a Conservative government."

The candidates were asked what their parties would do to give a "shot of energy" to the agricultural industry in Ontario.

"We definitely want to expand the risk management program," said Hamilton. "Also we want to create a new apprenticeship program for young people to develop the skills they need to be successful in a farming career."

She said the NDP is also committed to providing rural employers with a training tax credit and looking at creative thinking to encourage more "Buy Local" operations.

Johnson said the Liberals have a rural plan and they are proposing to expand the risk management program and make it easier for farmers to deal with environmental issues they face on their farms.

"We have a local food act proposed that will help with local markets to increase local food production and use," said Johnson. She added there will also be an increase in marketing to promote agriculture.

"In the last eight years under the McGuinty Liberals there have been times when it appeared the provincial government was fixated on the problems of the cities and less interested on the problems of rural and small town communities," said Arnott.

"I've always said if the provincial government supports our farm families they will in turn protect their own farmland," he said.

The candidates were also asked, by Halton Hills Councillor Bryan Lewis, what their position would be on funding for new arenas for the town.

Johnson said downloading from the previous Conservative government to municipalities has affected the Town's ability to build things in town.

She said because the Liberals are now uploading those costs back to the Province the Town will have access to more funds that aren't being sent out of the community to support social services elsewhere.

She stressed she can't say money will be forthcoming, but, if any infrastructure funding initiatives come forward she would advocate for infrastructure funding for arenas, pools and community centres.

"I would certainly support and push for these infrastructure improvements," said Hamilton.

Arnott said he believes there will be another round of stimulus funding in the next year or two, that the federal government would work with the provinces to create another infrastructure program municipalities could apply for.

"I would hope you (the town) would be successful in that endeavour," Arnott told Lewis. "I would support you in your endeavour in this respect any way I could."

The candidates were asked about their views on education.

"Our government is proposing a 30 per cent tuition grant," said Johnson. She said the family income cutoff for that grant is \$160,000 annually.

"We're pretty proud of the changes we've made in education through the past eight years," said Johnson.

She said Junior Kindergarten will be fully implemented by 2014 and is "a great program" that helps the youngest kids get a "really good head start."

She said the Liberals have also increased the graduation rate from 68 per cent to 81 per cent.

"The NDP would freeze tuition fees for post secondary education and eliminate the provincial interest rate for student loans," said Hamilton.

"I think it's important we encourage families to save for their children's education and I would advocate a provincial component to the Canada Education Savings Grant," said Arnott. He believes it should be targeted for families that need it the most.

Other questions were about the Buy Ontario policy, surgical wait times, and long-term care. The next all-candidates' meeting, town is set for Friday, 7:30-9 p.m., at the Gellert Community Centre's Kinsmen Room.



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Why Ted Arnott on Oct. 6th?

Ted Arnott helped secure \$2.6 million for Georgetown Hospital's ER and CT project.

Ted Arnott obtained approval for a new Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Centre Wellington.

Ted Arnott successfully called for the suspension of the GTA West Corridor Study, pending a review by the next Minister of Transportation.

Ted Arnott introduced the first Private Members' Bill in Ontario's history which was co-sponsored by MPPs of different parties. Passed into law, it proved MPPs can work together across party lines.

Ted Arnott pushed for and announced improvements to Highway 6 through Wellington County.

Ted Arnott hopes his greatest contribution is yet to come.

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WELLINGTON - HALTON HILLS

AUTHORIZED BY THE CFO FOR TED ARNOTT