

Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce grills candidates on economic policy

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The Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce held an all-candidates' debate for chamber members on Wednesday morning, where members asked candidates questions about a series of economic issues facing Ontario. "For business owners in this community, they need to know what parties will be looking out for their interest," said Peter Sproule, a moderator for the event.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) has released a 2018 platform called Vote Prosperity, outlining key recommendations for the elected party in the election.

Ontario's electricity rates have increased by over 71 per cent since 2008 and the OCC recommends the new government undertake a review of Ontario's electricity sector, as well as allow businesses to purchase surplus electricity for the same price that it's sold to external markets for.

Candidates from the Liberal, Green and Conservative party

were present at the event, however NDP candidate Diane Balcantyne could not be in attendance because she works as a full-time teacher at Centre Wellington District High School.

"There's been quite a strong push back from people," said Ted Arnott, Conservative MPP for Wellington-Halton Hills, vying for re-election. He said that the issue with hydro rates are the result of "specific and deliberate policy decisions within the current government."

Amid calls for an investigation into the hydro industry in Ontario, Arnott said "we need to stop signing contracts for hydro we don't need."

Green party candidate Dave Rodgers said that his government would support selling discount surplus electricity to small business.

Liberal candidate Jon Hurst said that hydro rates have risen because of the need to update aging infrastructure and to switch over to green energy sources.

The OCC is also calling on the new government to address a training gap in skilled labour-



Alexandra Heck/Metroland

Liberal candidate Jon Hurst speaking about the dangers of tax cuts leading to budget cuts in Provincial policy.

ers. The OCC reports that in the next ten years, 40 per cent of new jobs created in the province will be in the skilled trades, however, only 26 per cent of youth have an interest in pursuing jobs in that sector.

The chamber asked questions about broadband internet as well.

"In today's environment broadband internet is essential for small business," said Rodgers, adding that even his campaign manager curses his rural internet connectivity.

"The Liberal government is committed to expanding broadband connectivity," said Hurst.

Arnott stated that progress is

slow on the broadband file, but he is committed to continuing to lobby for rural access.

In addition to concerns about over-regulation and red tape, the chamber asked how candidates would address corporate taxes.

Arnott and the Conservatives propose to lower Ontario's corporate tax from 11.5 per cent to 10.5 per cent.

Rodgers said that the Green party would lower employer health taxes, and payroll taxes on small businesses.

"We all want to pay less tax," said Hurst, cautioning that "tax reduction needs to be offset somewhere else in the budget."

He asked the audience to remember the despair and crisis within health care and education during the Mike Harris government.

"We can't go back to that," he said. "The Liberal government will not go back to that."

It's estimated that the province is suffering a \$19 billion infrastructure gap, and the province's debt is expected to rise by 21 per cent in the next three years.

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