

Election candidates quizzed on wide variety of subjects at meeting

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"I believe we need to revamp the immigration system altogether," said Bouteiller.

"We need to keep the doors open to fill the skilled trade shortage and replace our soon to be retired baby boomers," said independent candidate Mike Wisniewski.

Wisniewski said the Conservatives' plan to arm border officers is one option he would like to take to his constituents for their opinion.

Chong was asked if he supported Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's proposal to include land rights in the Constitution, which the questioner said would affect other levels of government from protecting the environment and give corporations and individuals the right to quarry or dump on their own lands.

"I don't accept the premise of the question entirely," said Chong.

He said land rights in the Charter won't give landowners the right to dump toxic chemicals or do whatever they want to on their property.

"It means that events like the implementation of the greenbelt would not be done the way it was done recently," said Chong. He said if property rights were enshrined in the Constitution the government would have to pay compensation before implementing such a policy.

Finnie disagreed with Chong's view.

"The land and the water are the property of all of us. We are, some of us, more secure tenants, but we are only tenants," he said to a hearty round of applause.

The candidates were also asked how they

would meet and by what deadline, the .7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product UN suggestion on foreign aid, and what form would it take.

"We as a party are committed to the long-term goal of .7 per cent of GDP for foreign aid, however, we don't have a timeframe in which to commit to hitting that target," said Chong, who pointed to the foreign aid rate under Mulroney's Conservative government which was roughly .5 per cent. He criticized the Liberals for contributing much less than that.

"I think the fiscal record does speak for itself," said Finnie. "When the Conservatives left power in 1993 the deficit was approximately \$40 billion."

He said now that the Liberals have turned that around, they can attend to other priorities, and have committed to doubling aid from .28 per cent to .56 per cent in the short term.

Duignan said the NDP would raise the foreign aid contribution to .7 per cent by 2015, and introduce a debt cancellation strategy.

Bouteiller said the Green Party would meet the foreign aid target of .5 per cent by 2010, and .7 per cent by 2015.

Wisniewski said he had a different strategy for foreign aid.

"I believe that individual contributions should outweigh foreign aid," said Wisniewski, who would like to increase the percentage people can get back on their income taxes.

The candidates were also asked about their views on genetically modified food, human rights in China, an elected senate, and space-based weapons.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

Friday the 13th

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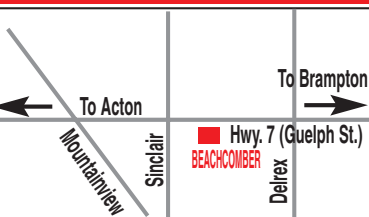
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