Election hopefuls show different side to Acton High School students

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Staff Writer

Students at Acton District High School got to see a different side of the five local-area hopefuls for next week's federal election at an all-candidates meeting last Friday.

Wellington-Halton Hills candidates gathered for a debate in the school's cafeteria with about 200 students in attendance that started off with a question and answer format.

CANADA VOTES

Seated at tables on a stage, the candidates were asked to say something positive about the person sitting to their left and all five were gracious in their characterization of the competition.

The audience also learned through a query from the student moderator the type of vehicles each of the candidates drive.

Conservative incumbent Michael Chong and Liberal foe Bruce Bowser both own late-model Volvos, while Green Party candidate Brent Bouteiller has a Toyota Echo, NDPer Noel Duignan drives a Ford Focus and Jeffery Streutker from the Christian Heritage Party is the owner of a Toyota Corolla with 470,000 kilometres on its odometer.

The candidates were asked what their party's stance was on global warming and the discussion then involved questions from students.

A student named Dallas wondered why politicians refer back to 1990s figures when discussing the environment, when they should be looking to the future to prevent possible irreparable damage to the planet.

Bouteiller responded, saying those figures are used as a measuring stick when setting goals and objectives to reducing emissions.

Bowser, who pointed out that the state of the environment was found to be the number one concern amongst youths today, was criticized, along with his party, by Duignan for not placing a number on what emission reductions would be.

A question posed to all candidates about voting against their own party led to Bowser quizzing Chong on why he resigned from Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cabinet last year after Chong disagreed with the Tory position on Quebec's status within Canada.

Chong received the loudest applause of the hour-long debate for his answer, stating that he didn't feel turning his back on his party was beneficial to anyone.

The NDP's Duignan mused about the irony of Wall Street having "embraced socialism" in light of the recent bank bailouts in the U.S., while also pondering the future and nature of the economy.

Another student asked Streutker what the CHP's opinion was on gay rights, and he responded by stating, "Marriage is for one man and one woman for life, and that excludes all others, including polygamist marriages."

That comment touched off a number of other questions from students in disagreement with Streutker's comments.

"It's your right to put an X beside my name," he responded.

Conservative candidate Michael Chong (centre) and New Democratic Party hopeful Noel Duignan ponder a question from an Acton High School student during Friday's all-candidates meeting at the school. Students got a chance to question the five candidates vying for the Wellington-Halton Hills seat. *Photo by Eamonn Maher*

Chamber meeting draws sparse crowd

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Fresh off a Wellington County Federation of Agriculture debate the previous night, all were ready for a question on incentives to agri-business.

Streutker proposed revamping the quota system, while Bouteiller looked to a new European co-op system as a possibility. He added that farmers should be provided their fair share of the dollars for the product they produce with emphasis on consumers buying locally-produced food.

Bowser agreed Canadians should be encouraged to buy Canadian and suggested grants for farmers to spend on "greener" operations and equipment purchases.

Chong said the federal government's $1.5 billion/year sent to the provinces is still not enough, but admitted he was uncertain how to fix it in the long-term. He added in the short-term Canadians have to protect existing farmlands from disappearing under housing.

Health care got a lot of air time too with a variety suggestions to improve wait times, train more doctors and overall preventative health care. All agreed wait times needed to be improved with blame being directed at actions by previous parties— Conservatives, Liberals and NDP.

Streutker supported privatization of health care, Bouteiller suggested international doctors should be fast-tracked through a mentoring process. Bowser said the Liberal infrastructure funding includes dollars for new hospitals and medical centres. Chong favoured the new primary health care system, which places doctors on a salary with a focus on preventative health care.

The candidates will be attending an all-candidates meeting tonight (Wednesday), 7 p.m. at the Puslinch Community Centre in Aberfoyle. The Federation of Agriculture-Halton will host an all-candidates meeting tomorrow (Thursday) at Halton Place, 9328 15 Sideroad. Doors open at 7 p.m. with the debate starting at 7:30 p.m.

Economy main topic at Guelph meeting

Ontario's stumbling economy was in sharp focus during a Wellington-Halton Hills all-candidates debate Monday night.

Four of five candidates turned out for the *Guelph Mercury*-sponsored event (Christian Heritage Party candidate Jeffery Streutker did not attend), fielding a steady and varied stream of questions from an audience of about 100, made up mostly of people over 50. The discussion remained cordial throughout the night, with a surprising amount of agreement between candidates on a number of key issues.

But on the economy and what to do to safeguard it from a mounting financial crisis south of the border, there was much differing opinion. Conservative Michael Chong urged voters to stay the course and allow the Stephen Harper Conservatives to continue running the country in what he called a fiscally responsible manner. His opponents naturally cautioned against such a move, saying Harper has been largely indecisive on the looming economic crisis.

Liberal candidate and political newcomer Bruce Bowser said the Tories' $60-billion promise falls far short of the more than $120-billion infrastructure deficit in this country. Chong countered by suggesting that 13 straight years of Liberal rule contributed to the infrastructure problem.

The Green Party's Brent Bouteiller sketched out an economic plan that included both a strong economy and a strong environment.

New Democratic Party candidate Noel Duignan agreed that a "new, green economy" must be the way of the future. He said Ontario's automotive sector must make dramatic changes in order to produce the kinds of cars that people want to drive.

—Torstar News Service

Liberal candidate Bruce Bowser (second from left) responds to a question during Friday's Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce-sponsored all-candidates meeting at North Halton Golf and Country Club. Fellow candidates (from left) Brent Bouteiller (Green), Michael Chong (Conservative) and Jeffery Streutker (Christian Heritage) wait their turn to answer. *Photo by Ted Brown*

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