

MP, debate organizers at odds over dates



LUI TEMELKOVSKI: Liberal candidate could not attend election debates for religious reasons.

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Liberal Lui Temelkovski was missing from election action over the past week, bowing out of several all-candidates meetings.

The reason? The Oak Ridges-Markham incumbent was observing his Orthodox Christian Christmas festivities and an important saint's day, said Bill Attwell, Mr. Temelkovski's campaign manager.

Mr. Temelkovski's office at first accepted invitations for candidates debates at the Ballantrae Golf and Country Club hosted by Councillor Phil Bannon Jan. 5 and at the Islamic Society of York Region Sunday. But Mr. Temelkovski's office phoned both a few days later to say he couldn't attend either event due to religious reasons.

This year, the Orthodox Christmas Eve fell on Jan. 5 with Christmas Day on Jan. 6. Christmas Day is celebrated by devotees by visiting church, according to the www.orthodoxnews.com website. Some traditional churches also cele-

brate Jan. 7. Mr. Attwell had requested a change of date for both the Jan. 5 and 8 events for Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Bannon noted he would have lost two other candidates for the debate if the date had been changed.

'PEOPLE DISAPPOINTED'

"A lot of people were disappointed he wasn't here," Mr. Bannon said. "People want to hear his message. Are we (Whitchurch-Stouffville) not important to him?"

More than 300 people attended the debate in Ballantrae.

Mr. Temelkovski didn't attend a candidates forum held at EastRidge Missionary Church in Stouffville Dec. 27 either. Organizers were told it was due to Mr. Temelkovski taking time off to be with his family between Christmas and New Year's.

Pleading for sensitivity to other people's traditions and religions in this multicultural society when events are organized, Mr. Attwell noted the degree to which the Orthodox festivities are observed depend

on the degree to which you are religious."

From Jan. 5 to 9 was one of the important time periods for Mr. Temelkovski, Mr. Attwell explained, noting Mr. Temelkovski was the founding president of St. Dimitrija Solunski Church, which opened in 1992 in Markham.

Mr. Temelkovski would have been at any debate outside of that time period, Mr. Attwell said.

"We asked again and

again to have the dates changed," Mr. Attwell said. "Our concern is when there are many cultures in Markham and Stouffville, we need to be sensitive to other cultures."

DEBATING TONIGHT

Mr. Temelkovski will be at a candidates' debate tonight at Brother Andre Catholic High School, hosted by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce,

the Markham Board of Trade, Richmond Hill Chamber of Commerce and the York Region Newspaper Group.

The debate is from 7 to 9 p.m. at 6160 16th Ave. in Markham. Friday he'll be at Richmond Green Secondary School in Richmond Hill, a forum for a student audience only. He'll be in Nobleton Saturday from 2 to 4 p.m. This debate is hosted by the Nobleton Chamber of Commerce.

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