

ELECTION 2006 The Debates



STAFF PHOTO/JOAN RANSBERRY

Markham-Oak Ridges candidates Steve Armes of the Green Party, Conservative Bob Callow, New Democrat Pamela Courtot and Liberal incumbent Lui Temelkovski put their differences aside following an all-candidates debate Thursday.

Child poverty takes back seat

There's no single bullet to eradicate child poverty, but why have we missed the mark for decades?

When the question landed on the table at Thursday's Oak Ridges-Markham all-candidates debate at Brother Andre Catholic High School, there was little response.

Perhaps the deafening silence tells its own story. Is the government's do-little approach directly tied to the public's who-cares attitude?

That may be so, but the facts won't go away. It's estimated that 1.2 million Canadian children live in poverty. Despite rising affluence, including here in Oak Ridges-Markham, the country's one-in-six child-poverty ratio hasn't changed much in about 30 years.

Should Canadians bow their heads in shame?

In 2005 UNICEF comparisons, Canada ranked 19th of 26 developed nations when it comes to the proportion of children living in poverty.

While countrywide poverty didn't light any fires at the local all-candidates forum, a backyard issue did. The 150 in attendance sat up and took notice when Conservative candidate Bob Callow said he's not convinced building a new airport in neighbouring Pickering is the right thing to do.

Some applauded when New Democrat Pamela Courtot and Green Party candidate Steve Armes assured everyone they're dead set against the airport. And Liberal incumbent Lui Temelkovski was met with a few groans when he suggested bringing people together to



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discuss the airport issue, now in its 30th year.

Of course, a final decision linked to the Pickering airport issue is long overdue. However, is now not also the time to tackle child poverty?

'Simply stocking food banks cannot bridge growing disparities between wealthy and poor Canadians.'

Conservative Bob Callow insists his party's \$1,200-a-year tax benefit will help lift families out of poverty, while Mr. Temelkovski suggests cutting taxes, coupled with creating more affordable housing and child care spots would do the trick.

Pointing the finger of blame away from themselves, Ms. Courtot and Mr. Armes agreed child poverty is an absolute travesty.

"It's outrageous that 15 per cent of our children live in poverty," Mr. Armes said.

In the land of party politics, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals have viewed poverty as a vote-getter.

Besides, poor people have been the responsibility of the NDP. But it must be noted, the Green Party seems to be willing to share the burden. Admitting that child poverty is a national disgrace, both the NDP and the Green Party have creditable poverty policies in place.

Reducing poverty is more important than hoarding wealth, Mr. Armes stressed.

"Simply stocking food banks cannot bridge growing disparities between wealthy and poor Canadians," he said.

Mr. Armes is correct when stating poverty is a systemic problem that reflects low minimum wages, a precarious job market, a lack of commitment to social housing, changes to employment insurance benefits and cuts in social programs.

The NDP is on the right track by proposing 200,000 affordable and co-op housing units be created to meet the needs of low-income families and seniors who, incidentally, are paying 50 per cent of their incomes for housing.

As the election campaign enters the home stretch, the latest national polls show the Conservatives with a comfortable lead. However, Mr. Temelkovski went into this election with a 11,000-vote lead, suggesting it could be a photo finish in Oak Ridges-Markham.

Whatever the outcome will it make any difference in the lives of impoverished children?

Liberals announce research campus

Project will go even if Grits lose, mayor vows

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

Future medical discoveries could carry Made-in-Markham tags.

Business and local government officials alike applauded Thursday at the Markham Civic Centre when Prime Minister Paul Martin's announced a \$180-million research and development plan, designed to target Markham, Toronto and Waterloo.

The four-part technological initiative includes a facility on an 11-acre, town-owned site at Kennedy Road and Hwy. 407.

To be known as the National Institute for Convergent Technologies, the Markham initiative will focus on the health-care sector, in particular the development of new diagnostic tools, medical robotics, prosthetics and targeted clinical applications.

"We've worked on this project for a long time and now we're very, very excited to see it come to fruition," Mayor Don Cousens said. "It will not only bring jobs, this will attract business to our community."

No matter which party forms the federal government, the Markham project is going to happen, Mr. Cousens said.

"It has the backing of the National Research Council so I don't think it matters who wins (the election)," he said.

Markham Board of Trade officials are watching the development.

"This project has been in the works for some time," board chairperson Glenn Crosby said. "This announcement is a huge step forward."

While the new institute will be local, its mandate will be national.

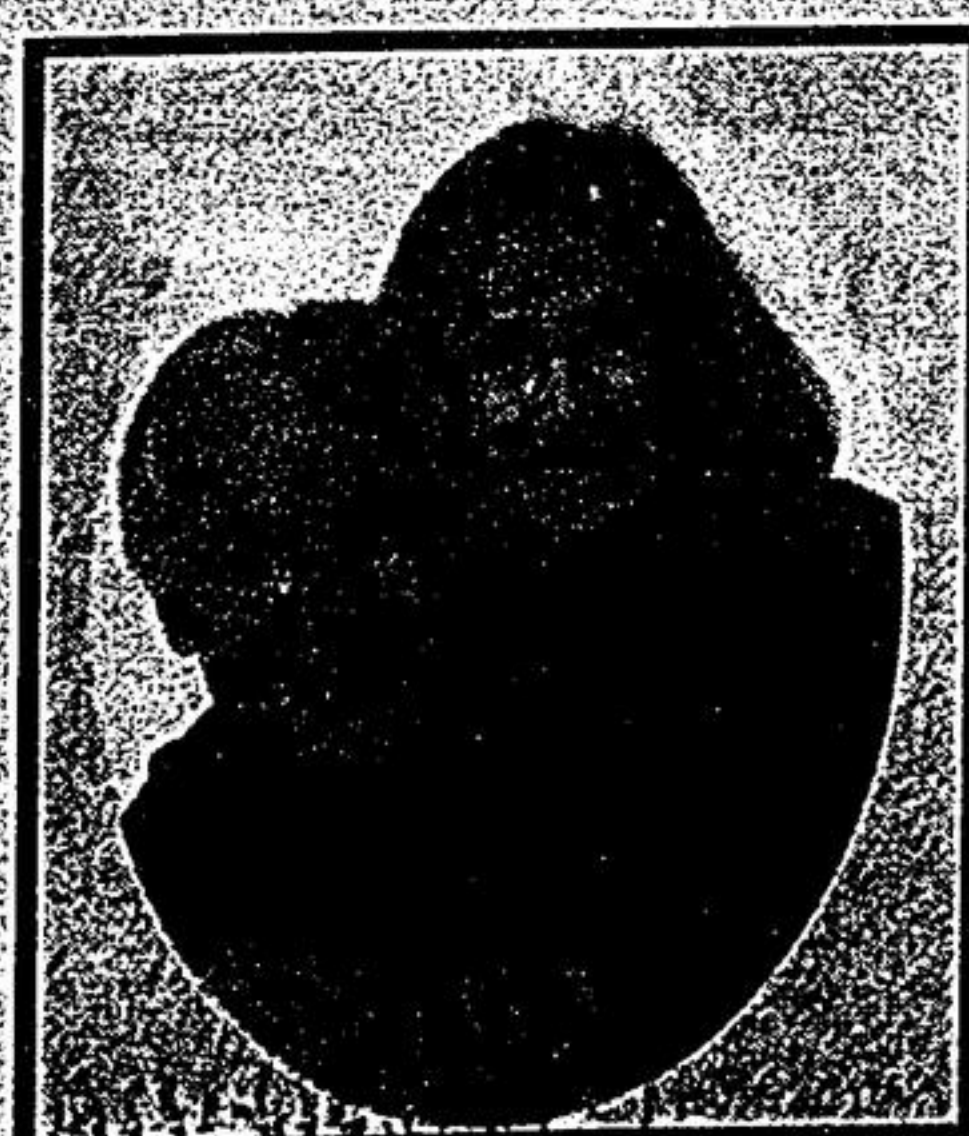
The National Institute for Convergent Technologies will be the same, with satellite operations and broadband connectivity and connections with other National Research Council institutes, across Canada," board of trade president Keith Bray said.

As well as the research council, the local project partners are the town, York University, the University of Waterloo and Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Science Centre and such private sector firms as IBM Canada.

"With its emphasis on medical devices, the new institute will have researchers from the biomedical and information technology sectors working together," Mr. Martin said.

If Canada is going to compete in the fast-paced global research and development economy, federal investment is critical, Dr. John Evens, co-chairperson of the Toronto Region Research Alliance, told about 100 people during Mr. Martin's visit.

"These research projects will benefit the region and, indeed, the entire country," Dr. Evens said. "These dramatic projects in Markham, Toronto and Waterloo will work synergistically to attract and retain world-class researchers, draw international investment and create new companies with high-quality jobs."



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