

Election candidates greeted by packed crowd in Uxbridge

Economy, spending priorities, Pickering airport lands debated

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[DON CAMPBELL](#)

UXBRIDGE -- It was standing-room only as residents crowded into the Uxbridge Seniors' Centre on Sunday night to hear the first all-candidates' meeting for the Durham riding.

Those in attendance heard candidates debate a range of topics including the economy, infrastructure spending, health care, education, defence spending and the deficit, and the Pickering airport lands.

While the audience reserved polite applause for each federal election candidate following opening remarks, it was a decidedly pro-Liberal crowd with candidate Grant Humes receiving the loudest ovation from the audience.

Throughout the evening, incumbent MP Bev Oda returned to her platform of government stability and the need to vote Conservative in order to "recover fully from the global economic recession." She pointed to Canada having the highest employment growth of any G7 nation combined with lowered corporate and income tax as proof.

Mr. Humes hit back at the incumbent, arguing the Conservatives inherited a budget surplus before the economic recession began and that Canada needs to focus on an innovative economy to remain competitive.

When it came to spending priorities, Green Party candidate Stephen Leahy argued that the Green Party plan to tax "those things that are harmful to our society" such as water and air pollution and put it towards health programs, sets it apart from the rest.

Andrew Moriarity, the candidate for the Christian Heritage Party, was vocal in his criticism of government spending, adding that money "could be spent on better things" in reference to the CBC, new fighter jets and the overall cost of hosting the G20 summit in Toronto.

"The over-arching problem is that we can't afford what we are paying for now," he added.

Candidates were also asked what they would like to see happen with the Pickering airport lands.

Mr. Leahy said he would look within the community to find the best possible use for the land.

"How can we use this as a productive green space?" he said, hinting at the area's potential for food production that could be consumed locally.

NDP candidate Tammy Schoep and Mr. Humes both said they were opposed to building an airport on the land, with Mr. Humes preferring to see a national park on the site.

Ms. Oda said any decision to build an airport should be made based on need and whether it could be attached to economic growth for the area.

"We want to make sure every area has an opportunity to grow," she added.

Libertarian Party candidate Blaize Barnicoat spoke very little during the question segment and declined to answer several questions, but when she did it was to reiterate her political philosophy.

As expected, the debate lacked a clear knockout punch and there was little to chose from in terms of defining moments. But special attention was reserved for the so-called "elephant in the room" that came at the end of the evening, regarding Ms. Oda's government being found in contempt of Parliament.

The issue stemmed from a denied funding application for KAIROS, an international aid organization, when the word "not" was inserted into a document, cancelling a \$7-million grant to the charity. Ms. Oda, who was the international co-operation minister, admitted she ordered the word "not" be inserted into the funding agreement after previously denying knowledge of who doctored the document. The issue was being reviewed by a House of Commons committee, but was stopped when the election was called.

Ms. Oda said the funding grant went through a "normal process" and that there was no forgery involved.

I agree it is the elephant in the room," she said. "But I was fulfilling my responsibility."

She added criticism of her actions was based on "unfounded allegations and name calling."

While most of the direct criticism for the affair came from the audience, Mr. Humes weighed in during his opening remarks.

"What role our representative played in that (issue) we will never know. I will leave that up to her to decide," he said.

Meanwhile, Ms. Schoep criticized both the Liberal and Conservative parties when it came to scandals.

"We have been back and forth between Liberal and Conservative governments, but they've proved neither of them are working for Canadians," she said.

Ms. Schoep argued that child poverty levels as well as more Canadian seniors living in poverty as signs both major parties are failing Canadians.

The candidates were also asked about democratic reform and whether they supported some form of proportional representation.

Mr. Leahy and Ms. Schoep both said they supported proportional representation, with the NDP candidate adding she also supports eliminating the Senate.

Ms. Oda pointed to her government's motion to re-align seats in Parliament so there would be fairer representation, while Mr. Humes said it was an issue he was not willing to support.

Durham riding residents will get another chance to hear their candidates debate on local television before heading to the polls on May 2.