

From the Peninsula News Review



Central Saanich students and community group grilled election candidates at debate

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The Saanich North and the Islands candidates were put through the wringer last night, but this time, by students.

Staff and students at Stelly's Secondary School partnered with the Central Saanich Community Association (CSCA) Wednesday, April 19, to host an All Candidates Debate prior to the upcoming provincial election.

The goal of the event was to get youth involved in politics and inform voters, along with introducing the relatively new (formed in November) community group, said Celeste Zimmer, CSCA chair.

Students were scarce in the audience, aside from the ones actively involved; however, the bleachers in Stelly's multipurpose room were filled with engaged community members.

Thirty-minutes prior to opening statements, each of the four candidates for Saanich North and the Islands – Gary Holman (NDP), Adam Olsen (Green), Stephen Roberts (BC Liberals) and Jordan Templeman (Independent) – were given a handful of propositions for debate. The proposed statements covered candidates' views on if the regional economy is environmentally sustainable, if liquid natural gas projects should be developed, if ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft should be allowed to enter British Columbia and if reduced development restrictions will improve the affordability of regional housing.

Student time-keeper Ammol Monga made sure the candidates did not go over one-and-a-half minutes.

After the debate, the student co-moderators – Jordyn Heal and Hunter Lastiwka – along with CSCA member Jess Bossert jumped right into the question period, drawing questions from a bowl that were previously submitted by email and that night by community members in the audience. The candidates were asked a total of 13 questions in an hour period.

Questions ranged from small business, to home care for seniors, to photo radar on major highways; just to name a few. Perhaps the question that put a wedge between the candidates was one pertaining to the Kinder Morgan Pipeline, asked specifically to Roberts. According to the anonymous question posed, one accident – or spill – occurs every 124 years, the question being if this is a risk he is willing to take.

Roberts' response was essentially yes – he would take the risk – as he said the KMP will not have a spill.

Olsen said he is not in support of the KMP, adding he thinks it's "astonishing" to hear Roberts "roll the dice" on the issue. Olsen's response elicited applause from the audience, despite audience members being asked to hold their applause until the end. Holman echoed Olsen's sentiments immediately after, garnering the same audience response.

Youth-specific questions were raised and each of the candidates were able to find common ground. For example, all of the candidates agree lowering the voting age to 16 is a worthy pursuit. A more telling question was raised about Stelly's' need for funding for a theatre. Each of the candidates were able to agree that they would procure funding for this.

After the question period candidates were able to give brief closing statements to summarize their personal opinions, as well as political party agendas.

Stelly's Vice Principal Gord Redlin said after the debate, "You know, it was absolutely wonderful. The kids did a fantastic job. These ones especially are great leaders in the school."

Link to original story:

<http://www.peninsulanewsreview.com/local-news/central-saanich-students-and-community-group-grilled-election-candidates-at-debate/>