

RNs put health care on the **election agenda**



RNAO's Essex chapter hosted its Politics and Pancakes event on Sept. 16 in Windsor. Teresa Piruzza, Liberal candidate for Windsor West (right), discusses her party's platform with local nurses (L to R) Debbie Kane, Amanda Ellard-Ryall, and Essex chapter president Jennifer Johnston.



On Sept. 22, RNAO's Regions 6 and 7 and RNAO Home Office co-hosted an all-candidates debate with (R to L) Kitchener-Waterloo Conservative MPP Elizabeth Witmer, Green Party Leader Michael Schreiner, St. Paul's Liberal MPP Eric Hoskins, and Nickel Belt NDP MPP France G elinas. Toronto Star columnist Carol Goar (at podium) acted as moderator.

Windsor RN Jennifer Johnston says she would do it again in a heartbeat. Planning an all-candidates debate in the run-up to the provincial election was a lot of work, but it was manageable – even fun – with the help of fellow executive members from the Essex chapter. “There won’t be another election for four years, but maybe we’ll plan something with politicians for Nursing Week,” the Essex chapter president speculates, adding with a touch of humour that “politicians are always politicking.”

Johnston was one of several RNAO members who planned political events for the first time this fall. Hamilton chapter co-chair Janet Glancy also worked alongside fellow chapter members to plan and execute an event in her community. “I have long thought about becoming more involved with politics but never knew where to start,” she says. “Over the years, my association with RNAO and the great role models who work in this amazing association have been life changing. RNAO is a force to be reckoned with, and the event we held is evidence of the influence it has on local members and the public.”

In addition to events in Windsor and Hamilton, RNAO members in Listowel, London, Peterborough, Guelph and Toronto also

hosted debates that drew anywhere from 80 to 400 participants.

“I can’t stress enough the importance of getting closely involved in an election. By sharing the views of nurses with colleagues, peers and the public at large, RNs can – and do – influence the outcome of an election,” says RNAO Executive Director Doris Grinspun. “When you get people talking – whether they’re talking about specific nursing issues or the health of the population in general – you awaken a passion that ultimately translates into ballots at voting stations across the province.”

RNAO’s Regions 6 and 7, in partnership with home office, had 400 registered participants at the all-candidates debate the groups co-hosted at St. Michael’s Hospital on Sept. 22. “I was amazed by how young our audience members were,” Lisa Crawley Beames, Region 7 treasurer and one of the event’s organizers, said of the number of engaged students she met. “And they weren’t just focused on their own little corner of the world. They were looking at issues in a broader sense, thinking about the impact of things like emissions on the community at large. I wasn’t that engaged when I was a young nurse.”

RNAO’s *Creating Vibrant Communities* platform, with its focus

Before heading to the polls for Ontario's provincial election on Oct. 6, nurses across the province planned events that would ensure health care was a key election issue.



Dierdre Pike, social planner for the Research Council of Hamilton (right), leads MPP hopefuls through discussion and debate at a Hamilton chapter election event on Sept. 14. Panelists included (R to L) Green Party candidate Peter Ormond, Liberal candidate and RNAO member Kathryn McGarry, NDP candidate Monique Taylor, and Conservative candidate and RN Laurie Scott.

on health equity, sustainable/green communities, enhanced health care, and nursing solutions, was a starting point for members in each of the communities hosting events. It was helpful in establishing targeted questions for the politicians. Naturally, debate also leaned towards more specific, community based issues such as mental health, child care, LHINs, tuition fees, elder care and abuse, woman abuse, NP-led clinics, and in one case, euthanasia.

As Johnston suggests, “politicians are always politicking.” That’s something Grinspun knows all too well. And that’s what she reminds nurses of when they start to get back to life as usual after the election results are final. “There’s no reason to stop connecting with MPPs,” she says. RNAO’s Annual Day at Queen’s Park is set for March 1; another opportunity to meet one-on-one with MPPs – novice and seasoned – and another chance for members to influence and make a difference.

For information about this and other opportunities to get involved in political activity, visit www.RNAO.org/politicalaction. **RN**

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How did nurse candidates fare?

There were 11 nurses running as candidates in Ontario’s Oct. 6 provincial election. RNAO members Cathy Crowe, NDP candidate in Toronto Centre, Gurleen Gill, Green Party candidate in Etobicoke North, and Kathryn McGarry, Liberal Party candidate in Cambridge, were not successful in their respective races.

Four other RNs who were elected include: Liberal Madeleine Meilleur, Ottawa-Vanier; Liberal Soo Wong, Scarborough-Agincourt; Conservative Laurie Scott, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock; and NDP Cindy Forster, Welland.

All have distinguished careers and held elected office prior to their wins. Meilleur has been a cabinet minister, Forster is a former mayor, Scott was a sitting MPP who resigned her seat for former Conservative Leader John Tory during the last provincial election, and Wong has been a school trustee.

Other nurse candidates who were not successful include: RN Raymond Dartsch and RPN Kyle Jones, both running for the Green Party, and RNs Moya Johnson and Betty Somerville for the Liberals.