

Seymour candidates debate anti-terrorism bill

Jeremy Shepherd / North Shore News

September 25, 2015 05:46 PM



Lynne Quarmby, Green Party candidate for Burnaby North-Seymour, speaks at Thursday's electoral debate at North Lonsdale United Church. photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

A crowd of voters packed the pews at North Lonsdale United Church Thursday night to listen to three federal candidates debate inflation, legislation, proportional representation, and just what to do with Bill C-51.

The Conservative government's anti-terrorism bill took a drubbing from the three Burnaby North-Seymour candidates.

"It is the most dangerous legislation we have had in recent Canadian history," said NDP candidate Carol Baird Ellan, who promised an immediate repeal of Bill C-51 if her party takes power.

While acknowledging the bill was "horribly drafted," Liberal candidate Terry Beech told the crowd an update of Canada's anti-terrorism laws is essential.

The last comprehensive legislation concerning terrorism was passed before lawmakers had any understanding of the scope or power of the Internet, according to Beech, who promised his Liberals would continue to push for greater oversight.

The bill needs to be scrapped, argued Green Party candidate Lynne Quarmby, who suggested there was no baby to throw out with that bathwater.

"I haven't heard anything in Bill C-51 that needs to stay," she told the onlookers.

Baird Ellan agreed.

Rather than focusing on terrorists, the bill targets environmental activists, she said. "We know it's actually targeted at environmentalists because (Conservative MP) Joe Oliver called them radicals," she said.

While most candidates might downplay any time spent in handcuffs, Quarmby spoke proudly of the protest against

Kinder Morgan's proposed Trans Mountain pipeline expansion that led to her arrest. "I was sued by Kinder Morgan, I was arrested for violating the injunction in an act of civil disobedience. I thought I was done, and then Elizabeth May called," she said, explaining her decision to run.

Baird Ellan, a former judge, berated the National Energy Board hearings, dubbing them "a kangaroo court."

Quarmby challenged the NDP position on the pipeline expansion, stating they had yet to take a definitive stance as a party.

"I'm opposing the Kinder Morgan pipelines and all other pipelines," she said. "If we're not going to expand the oil sands, we don't need any pipelines."

Beech, who has a home along the pipeline, assured the audience he took the issue very seriously.

He also reminded the crowd of the Liberals' pledge to invest in green infrastructure and public transit.

The Liberals will also invest in affordable housing and access to education, according to Beech, who called the approach a "holistic solution" to the dearth of opportunities available to young Canadians.

Besides who to vote for, candidates also debated how Canadians should vote.

Both Baird Ellan and Quarmby talked about ushering in a system of proportional representation as a top priority.

That conversation led to an exchange about strategic voting, a practice Quarmby decried.

"There's another kind of strategic voting . . . you use the strategy of: 'I am going to vote for the person that I think will best represent me in Parliament,'" Quarmby said.

Baird Ellan disagreed.

"The sad reality of our system is that only one of us is running for a party that can form government," she said. "In the next election people can vote with their hearts."

Mike Little, Conservative candidate for Burnaby North-Seymour, did not attend the debate.

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