

Candidates to face off for first time in by-election debates



Three candidates for MPP of Windsor-Tecumseh. From left: Jeewen Gill for the Ontario Liberals, Percy Hatfield for the Ontario NDP, and Robert de Verteuil for the Ontario PC Party. (The Windsor Star)

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Organizers of this week's two provincial byelection debates are hoping for smart exchanges that address issues important to voters in Windsor-Tecumseh.

Andrew Dowie, head of the local chapter of professional engineers, is organizing a Tuesday evening debate at Place Concorde on Forest Glade Drive.

"I'm hoping for a very interesting and lively discussion given that this will be the first engineering debate held in Windsor," he said.

He's reaching out to everyone –not just engineers – in the community to attend, claiming that "anybody can understand" the topics to be argued.

Candidates will have to answer questions about health and safety, infrastructure, and science and technology.



Dan Dominato is the Ontario Libertarian Party candidate for Windsor-Tecumseh.

Dowie said these issues affect voters every day, whether through roads or hydro bills.

He said candidates Percy Hatfield (NDP), Robert de Verteuil (PC), and the Libertarian party's Dan Dominato will take the stage at 7:30 p.m. in the Richelieu Room. Dowie said he's expecting about 100 heads to fill the room.

Liberal candidate Jeewen Gill said Tuesday's debate didn't fit into his schedule because he's busy trying to get as much canvassing in before election day as possible.

However, Gill said he will be attending Thursday morning's chamber of commerce debate at the Caboto Club, along with Hatfield and de Verteuil.

Matt Marchand, the chamber's president, said the group's members have asked to hear candidates battle it out over the economy, energy, and government accountability.

Gill said that he suspects many of the questions he hears Thursday will be the same as those he hears at voters' front doors, and that he's "pretty confident" he can offer up solutions.

But that doesn't mean the discussion, expected to bring out anywhere from 50 to 75 voters, will be limited to those issues.

Conservative candidate de Verteuil said debates often provide the chance for members of the public to ask "refreshing" questions.

"Sometimes people have ordinary concerns that don't actually get a lot of time," he said.

He said it can be equally refreshing to listen to the candidates offer up more candid answers devoid of "spin."

Hatfield, who's moderated debates during past provincial elections, said he wants voters to recognize his experience as a politician in his first go as a participant.

He said he hopes exchanges between candidates will be "cordial," but said that as the putative frontrunner, he's vulnerable to attacks from all sides.

Organizers and candidates also admitted that engaging the community in political discussion at a time when sunshine and vacation are on the minds of many can be challenging.

"I imagine the candidates are seeing the same thing," Dowie said. "Lots of people who are at the cottage, who are out enjoying the pool and politics is the last thing they want to be talking about."

De Verteuil agreed that talking about government in the lazy summer months can be difficult, but said those who "care know what's going on."

The chamber of commerce debate starts at 8:30 a.m. after a light breakfast and costs \$10 for members or \$15 for non-members.