



## Candidate Forum allows political hopefuls chance to connect with community

By Katelyn Boulanger

Both Mitch Obach and Richard Perchotte answered questions well at the region's recent Candidate Forum and it looks like Selkirk residents will have a strong representative regardless of who wins the local election seat.

The Candidate Forum took place at the Lord Selkirk Composite Secondary School and was hosted by the Lord Selkirk School Division's Board of Trustees.

Lena Kublick, the school board's chair welcomed residents to the event, she took the time to explain that the School Board is a non-partisan group interested in clarity. She also spoke to the absence of the Red River North candidates at the event.

"The candidates for Red River North were also contacted. The office of Jeff Wharton indicated that he was not participating and the NDP candidate, Alicia Hill has a previous commitment and sends her regrets and was unable to be here. So just in the interest of full disclosure, those candidates were also invited," said Kublick.

Kublick then turned over the event to event moderator Daryl Loeppky who gave residents some information about how the event was going to take place. He explained that each candidate would have two minutes to answer each question and that they would go back and forth with regards to who would answer first. The questions were submitted by residents.

Due to the volume of questions that were answered at this event the *Selkirk Record* has opted to include a small selection of regionally relevant questions answered in this article.

The first question asked candidates to tell residents about their backgrounds, why they are running and what makes them a suitable candidate.

Perchotte responded, "In 1985 was

the first time I walked through these doors of this high school. I came through as a student and I spent grades 11, and 12 here. Throughout the years, I've met hundreds of friends throughout the region. It's truly the area that makes this area fantastic. It's the people that make this a community. This theatre we were in today is named after one of the special teachers I had, Mr. Vadeboncoeur. I didn't know at that time when I walked through those doors that 10 years later, my wife and I would have been welcoming our daughter into this world. Our daughter, who has gone on to be an amazing person, she went on to become a school teacher with two degrees. She works at the rehabilitation center for children and runs one of the programs and she is just an advocate for people with disabilities. Two years after she was born, we welcomed our son. Our son has also graduated from this school and he has surpassed any expectations we had and currently runs our family business and our day to day operations. In business, we have worked throughout North America and we only did that work because we concentrated on the service, what the customers want and what they needed and what's important. That's the same values that I bring to government. To work for the people to find out what they need to make sure that we meet those goals together."

Obach responded, "I live right here in Selkirk. My wife and I have lived here for over 10 years and we absolutely love it. We have no plans on going anywhere else. This is the home we found and I've actually lived here longer than I've lived anywhere else in my life. So, it's where we want to be. I'm a teacher by trade. I have worked

Continued on page 4

**4 The Selkirk Record** Thursday, September 21, 2023  
**> CANDIDATE FORUM, FROM PG. 3**

for the Lord Selkirk School Division and others. I'm actively involved in the community. I founded the Interlake Thunder Football Club back in 2011. It's grown to one of the largest clubs in Manitoba. I've done lots of coaching football, baseball, hockey, won a few championships along the way, which I'm very proud of. I'm active in other community groups as well. Selkirk Community Choir, the SCRC, IRHA at one time, and with the Teachers Association too. And, just recently, I did a master's degree in Community Development, which leads us all back to why we're here today and why I decided to run. And honestly, there's a very distinct difference, two different views when it comes to education that I think you're going to see on the stage today. I think you're going to see two very nice guys, but with two very different views of what education should look like, here locally, and in Manitoba and we're going to get into all of that. But it was really Bill 64 that got me fired up seeing the way the community responded to it. The way they had to rally against it encouraged me to get back active in politics."

Both candidates took a swing at responding to an inquiry about what their immediate plans are to start sav-

ing Lake Winnipeg.

Obach said, "Well, the biggest nutrient point source into Lake Winnipeg is the North End Treatment plant and for whatever reason, for years, our provincial government decided they want to scrap with the Feds over funding. They want to scrap with the municipalities and the City of Winnipeg. We need to get this project done because it's the first and best thing we can do to help save the lake. Okay. This is a perfect example of where governments need to work together. It doesn't matter what political stripe they're from, we can't be suing other levels of government, right? We need to go to the table and work together, just like we can't be freezing funding to municipalities year over year. So, the NDP truly believes that if we all work together, everyone here wants to save Lake Winnipeg, wants to save all of our lakes and that we can get that done. We've also recently committed to achieving the National set goal of 30 per cent protected areas and everyone knows in Manitoba that that's going to mean a lot of lakes and wetlands as well.

Perchotte said, "Mitch is absolutely correct, the largest portion of pollution in our lake comes from the sewage being dumped. We watched for



RECORD PHOTOS BY KATELYN BOULANGER

Richard Perchotte (left) and Mitch Obach (right) discussed how they would represent our region at the Candidate Forum last week.

decades and decades, sewage flow right by our docks. But that was postponed. There were dates given and extended, dates given and extended, dates given and extended by the NDP government. The PC government said enough. Here's your mandate. You have a date there. Get your plant done. Get it to code. Get your problem sorted out. Stop sending us your crap and that's what we'll do."

Since the event was hosted in the high school education questions were right at home. The topic of school funding is important to residents and so Loepky asked on behalf of a resident, "The education property tax rebate resulted in the government needing to borrow money to pay for it. How does your party plan to fund education going forward? Is your party planning to invest new money into education, and where?"

Perchotte's response was. "Trying to make ends meet for people is something we're committed to do and we are committed to removing the education portion off of the property tax. Borrowing money is not a ter-

rible thing. People borrow money for homes, for cars, for many different things. But come 2025, we will have a balanced budget. We need to make sure that education is foremost centre of our attention. We need to continue to put the education level that we expect for our kids as a priority and make sure that schools are funded. We made a commitment to build 20 schools, we're on track to build 22. Twenty-two new state of the art facilities that our children will learn and hopefully their children, like our children, will come back to year after year. We need to continue to focus and make sure that we plan ahead and we take a look at the demographics of our children - where they're coming from and what are their needs are and make sure that we implement that strategically in the school system before it becomes a major problem. We need to be adherent to the needs of the communities that those schools are in and make sure that we then adjust our focus to make sure that we address their needs."

Continued on page 5

**> CANDIDATE FORUM, FROM PG. 4**

Obach's response was. "Times are tight, and everyone knows that and I kind of already addressed this in the sense that we will commit to maintaining a 50 per cent school tax rebate. We will stop sending cheques to billionaires from out of province because we don't think they need the rebate and we will stop sending it to you in the form of a paper cheque because 600,000 cheques plus postage is a waste of money. And, it's a pain if people don't get it on time when they have to pay their tax bills. We're also committed to stable, predictable funding for school divisions. And, I'm sorry if I sound like a broken record on that one but I really think that that is what's been missing in our school system for the last seven years and we need to get back to a place where the school divisions know they're getting a baseline funding plus loss cost of living at the very least. And, it's predictable year after year so that they can make plans to make improvements and investments in our schools."

The next question involved industry. "There's a lot of opposition to the silica sand mining that would directly affect jobs here in Selkirk and elsewhere in Manitoba if not allowed. What is each of the party's stand on allowing these projects to go forth creating a huge economic spin-off for our area?" Loeppky asked.

Obach said, "It's a good question and it's an issue that's been in the news a lot lately because people do have concerns. And I think that's

fair but I think it's important that we study the report of the Clean Environment Commission, to make sure that any projects are done with the safety of the environment in mind, and that we make sure that we're partnering with communities. I know in this case, I think we're talking more about the Dugald area. I know there's another potential project up there, I think it's in the Hollow Water area. Let's make sure we're working with communities, with First Nations, all those partners, so that if we can do something safely and properly, we can achieve those spin-offs together. I understand silica sand is what's needed to create the glass for solar panels and I would rather have my solar panels made in Selkirk than in China. But we've got to make sure it's right. We've got to make sure we're looking after the people that work in those industries so that it's a safe, good green job for them and that we're protecting our environment for generations to come."

Perchotte said. "As the premier announced today [Sept. 12], the future of Manitoba is based on economic growth. Bringing industry into our province, bringing workers into our province, retaining the workers we have here, educating the people in our province is the foremost responsibility for our government to make sure we're sustainable for the future. We have to make sure that whatever projects we're doing, we're doing safely and where the environments

*The Selkirk Record* Thursday, September 21, 2023 **5**

are not going to have any negative effects. We're all afraid to change. Recently, behind our house where my wife and I are, they were talking about a subdivision. We didn't want it. We were against it. We complained about it and they built it. We love it. Everybody's afraid of change. If you give everything an opportunity. It can work. We need to sit down and take a look at the actual facts. What is the economic spin-off from these developments that we can do? What is the alternative? Are there any negative effects? If there are negative effects? What do we have as a contingency clause to make sure that we mitigate those negative effects and what we can do to move forward to make sure that the community is protected, and we can grow our industry around here and have everybody benefit from sustainable development."

Care for our province's seniors is important locally and provincially.

Loeppky asked for responses from the candidates about what specific improvements in home care services they are committed to.

Perchotte responded by saying, "Health care is up front and centre. Across this world, there's a health-care epidemic. So, we need to make sure that these people, not just for financial reasons stay in their home but we have to do it for mental health reasons. You don't feel healthier than when you're at home surrounded by your loved ones. We offer programs through the government to make sure that any aids that you need in your house and to make your life sustainable, or you can have specialized equipment, whether it be wheelchair ramps, access to porter devices, those types of items, they're available for you. We want people to feel part of the community and age through. As I

Continued on page 6

**MANITOBA VOTES**  **Oct. 3, 2023** **WHY SHOULD YOU CARE ABOUT ELECTION 2023?**

- Quality health care
- Fighting crime
- Poverty reduction
- New infrastructure
- Improving accessibility
- Tax and deficit cuts
- Fiscal sustainability



**EDUCATION**

**6** *The Selkirk Record* Thursday, September 21, 2023

## > CANDIDATE FORUM, FROM PG. 5

go throughout canvassing and to the senior centres, that is a priority for most people to make sure that they are treated with dignity and respect. So, we need to make sure that we continue to do that."

Obach responded by saying, "Home care used to be one of the crown jewels of our health-care system. It was actually the Manitoba NDP under Ed Schreyer that brought in the first home care system in Canada. Regrettably, because they seem to want to go to labour war with staff because they're not looking after people that work in the health-care system, we've lost a lot of our home care workers. I have met numerous over the last few months knocking on doors. We committed just the other day that we would have a 100 more home care workers working in Manitoba and that we would greatly increase the mileage rates that they receive, because that is one of the biggest issues that they're facing when I talk to home care workers, especially in rural Manitoba, is that it's just not a cost effective job. We need to find programming that helps get them back in there because our seniors do want to age in place. It is more cost effective when people can live in their own homes longer. And, seniors that are dealing with issues

like dementia, it is so much easier for them to maintain a lifestyle in a familiar setting like their home. So we really need to invest in home care. The workers are there. They're waiting for a government that treats them with respect and pays them adequately so that they can get out there and make a living, providing the care that they want to."

The candidates wrapped up the evening by being given two minutes to speak about any topics or issues that they wanted to address with residents.

Perchotte concluded with, "The funding model for the schools doesn't work. We have an outdated system that funds schools based on the property value around there. We need to make sure that we have a new model moving forward. That we take a look and that schools are funded based on students. Every student needs representation from government, not based on where they live but based on the education we can provide. We talked about cutting 14 cents off the gas, we talk about holding rates on hydro, those are temporary solutions. We talked about the rebates, those are temporary solutions. The Conservative government wants to reduce your taxes, take the education portion

off of your property taxes, not 50 per cent, 100 per cent. We don't need to have both hands in your pocket. We need to make sure that we are giving back to you not giving it back as a rebate after we took too much money and we try to appease you. We need to make sure that the money stays in your pocket. Fifty-five hundred dollars per family right now staying in your pocket. We're looking at all the ways to keep funding programs, education, infrastructure, and make sure that our health care keeps healing. We didn't just get here overnight. For two decades, nobody thought Baby Boomers were going to age up. Well, they did. We can't sit back. We need to make a plan, or we plan to fail. And that's what happened in the previous government. We're going make sure that we move forward and we have a plan."

Obach concluded with, "In regards to how education is funded, it has to be funded. You can remove the property tax, but then we need a model that ensures that it's properly funded. There was information that came out this spring that showed under the new model that the conservatives are considering would be a \$7.5 million cut to the Lord Selkirk School Division. That's not acceptable. Then subsequently, Minister Ewasko won't

tell us what the model looks like. He won't share that with us. If we're going to make changes, we have to make sure that we're still funding education properly that it's consistent, reliable, year after year to allow school divisions to plan so that they can provide the supports that our students need. In terms of this election, overall, I think this is my closing remarks. I've talked to a lot of people, thousands of people over the last year knocking on doors and one of the biggest issues I find is that people are struggling to trust this government. They saw what was brought forward on Bill 64 and thankfully, it was the community that rallied against that. But I mean, even if that was the beginning of the end for Brian Pallister that bill was put on the floor of the legislature, moved by Cliff Cullen, seconded by Heather Stefanson and when Brian left they got promoted. We have to consider trust this election. We need to make sure that we elect government that wants to work with people, that wants to work collaboratively, that wants to bring people together to find solutions for our communities and for our province."

Loeppky thanked both candidates for attending the evening's event.