

All-candidates' forum had heated moments

Klondike MLA Steve Nordick was on the defensive throughout last Thursday evening's all-candidates' election forum in Dawson City.

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By Alyssa Friesen, Special to the Whitehorse Star

DAWSON CITY – Klondike MLA Steve Nordick was on the defensive throughout last Thursday evening's all-candidates' election forum in Dawson City.

The event, held at the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Community Hall, attracted a full house to question and hear the three candidates vie for the Klondike seat.

Sandy Silver, the Liberal candidate, took command of the discussion with applause-drawing promises, and Jorn Meier of the NDP, though struggling with articulation, also emphasized change.

For the three-minute opening statements, Meier went first, followed by Silver and Nordick. Meier declined the 30-second statement opportunity that followed.

David Rohatensky, a Parks Canada supervisor, was the moderator, leading a lively question period between the public and the candidates.

A continuous stream of people lined up behind the two mikes positioned on either side of the hall.

Questions included the aging population, the hospital which is under construction, the housing crunch, placer mining on the Dome Road, child care, a bus service, energy policies, addictions and mental health care solutions, and ambulance services.

Rohatensky also voiced questions collected from a public drop box at the post office.

At the climax of the debate, an hour and 20 minutes into the hour and 40-minute forum, Nordick faced an impassioned verbal attack from an audience member on the position of Nordick and his Yukon Party on the Peel River watershed.

The question initially generated audience applause, and later laughter as the questioner continued to bombard Nordick with outbursts from his seat, unsatisfied with Nordick's response.

“Like a judge saying you're guilty before he even listens to the court case, there is a process,” Nordick said. “What we need to do is sign the MOU signed by the four First Nations governments and the territorial government.

“I think it is time that we have a government in place that is willing to work with the First Nations,” said Meier, given his chance to respond.

“It’s an insult to the process and the good people who are behind these five years of planning for the government not to sign on, and ask them to come back with another number,” added Silver.

Cutting off the public, Rohatensky gave the candidates a 10-minute break before two-minute closing remarks took place.

The order followed the reverse of the opening comments.

“If elected, I am looking forward to meet with daycare, with the arts community, with the emergency measures community, with the Klondike Visitors Association, with any group that would like to meet with me that I can help to assist in their need to deliver better services,” said Meier.

Meier also gave his home phone number: “If I do get elected — write this number down, don’t throw it out — if I get elected, I will be your employee.”

Silver thanked the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in in Hän “for allowing us to take this forum in your traditional lands and also in your community hall” and asked the audience to “vote with your heads not just with your hearts.

“Ideally, all of us can agree on a Yukon that is prosperous and pollution-free with jobs and health care and education for all,” Silver said.

“But don’t be fooled by promises.... You are not voting for parties and you are not voting for policies. You are voting for a person.”

Finally, Nordick restated the economic losses Dawson faced in 2002: “This town was bankrupt shortly after that. Are we better today than we were in 2002? Yes we are,” said Nordick.

“I base all my decisions on consultation and the fact I want to be proud of this community,” continued Nordick, “I want my daughter, and my wife, and my family and friends to be proud of this community for years to come.”

Most of the riding’s eligible voters live in Dawson and the surrounding area.

In 2006, the voter turnout was approximately 80 per cent, with 898 of 1,122 registered voters at the polls. Nordick was elected with 45 per cent of the vote.